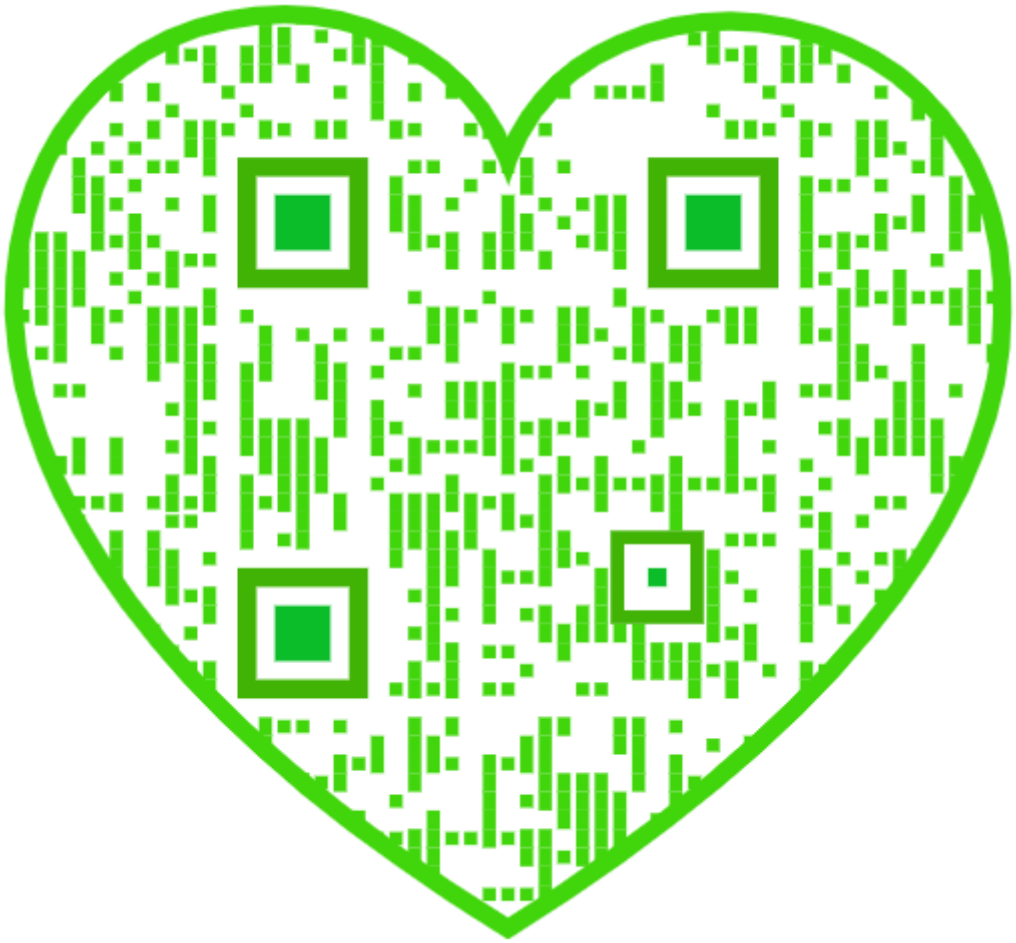

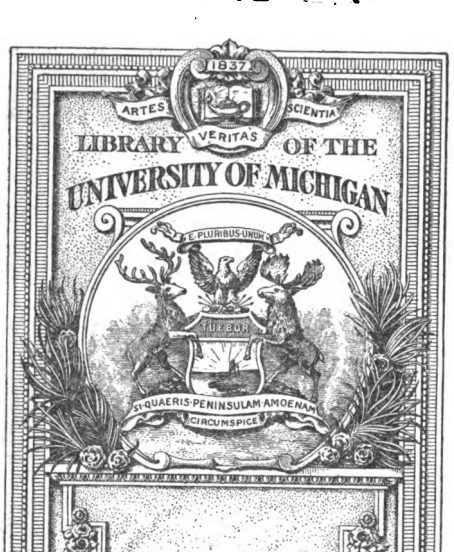
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The

Baron's Yule Feast.

LONDON:
Printed by A. SPOTTISWOODE,
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The Baron's Yule Feast:

A

Christmas-Rhyme.

By

Thomas Cooper,
The Chartist.

LONDON
JEREMIAH HOW
69 PICCADILLY
1846.

175-38

TO

THE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON.

Lady, receive a tributary lay
From one who cringeth not to titled state
Conventional, and lacketh will to prate
Of comeliness — though thine, to which did pay
The haughty Childe his tuneful homage, may
No minstrel deem a harp-theme derogate.
I reckon thee among the truly great
And fair, because with genius thou dost sway,
The thought of thousands, while thy noble heart
With pity glows for Suffering, and with zeal
Cordial relief and solace to impart.
Thou didst, while I rehearsed Toil's wrongs, reveal
Such yearnings! Plead! let England hear thee plead
With eloquent tongue, — that Toil from wrong be freed!

ADVERTISEMENT.

Several pieces in the following Rhyme were written many years ago, and will be recognised by my early friends. They were the fruit of impressions derived from the local associations of boyhood, (of which, the reader, if inclined, may learn more in the notes,) and of an admiration created by the exquisite beauty and simplicity of Coleridge's 'Christabel,' — which I had by heart, and used to repeat to Thomas Miller, my playmate and companion from infancy, during many a delightful 'Day in the Woods,' and pleasing ramble on the hills and in the woods above Gainsborough, and along the banks of Trent.

I offer but one apology for the production of a metrical essay, composed chiefly of imperfect and immature pieces: — the ambition to contribute towards the fund of Christmas entertainment, in which agreeable labour I see many popular names engaged, — and among them, one, the most deservedly popular in the literature of the day. The favour with which an influential portion of the press has received my 'Prison Rhyme' emboldens me to take this step; and if the flagellation of criticism be not too keenly dealt upon me for the imperfections in the few pages that follow, I will be content, in this instance, to expect no praise.

134, *Blackfriars Road,*
Dec. 20. 1845.

THE

BARON'S YULE FEAST.

A

Christmas Rhyme.

Canto I.

Right beautiful is Torksey's hall,[1]
  Adown by meadowed Trent;
Right beautiful that mouldering wall,
And remnant of a turret tall,
  Shorn of its battlement.

For, while the children of the Spring
  Blush into life, and die;
And Summer's joy-birds take light wing
  When Autumn mists are nigh;
And soon the year — a winterling —
  With its fall'n leaves doth lie;

That ruin gray—
Mirror'd, alway,
Deep in the silver stream,
Doth summon weird-wrought visions vast,
That show the actors of the past
Pictured, as in a dream.

Meseemeth, now, before mine eyes,
The pomp-clad phantoms dimly rise,
Till the full pageant bright—
A throng of warrior-barons bold,
Glittering in burnished steel and gold,
Bursts on my glowing sight.

And, mingles with the martial train,
Full many a fair-tressed beauty vain,
On palfrey and jennet—
That proudly toss the tasselled rein,
And daintily curvet;
And war-steeds prance,
And rich plumes glance
On helm and burgonet;

And lances crash,
And falchions flash
Of knights in tourney met.

Fast fades the joust! — and fierce forms frown
That man the leaguered tower, —
Nor quail to scan the kingly crown
That leads the leaguering power.

Trumpet and "rescue" ring! — and, soon,
He who began the strife
Is fain to crave one paltry boon: —
The thrall-king begs his life!

Our fathers and their throbbing toil
Are hushed in pulseless death;
Hushed is the dire and deadly broil —
The tempest of their wrath; —
Yet, of their deeds not all for spoil
Is thine, O sateless Grave!
Songs of their brother-hours shall foil
Thy triumph o'er the brave!

Their bravery take, and darkly hide
Deep in thy inmost hold!
Take all their mailëd pomp and pride
To deck thy mansions cold!
Plunderer! thou hast but purified
Their memories from alloy:
Faults of the dead we scorn to chide —
Their virtues sing with joy.

Lord of our fathers' ashes! list
A carol of their mirth;
Nor shake thy nieve, chill moralist!
To check their sons' joy-birth: —

It is the season when our sires
Kept jocund holiday;
And, now, around our charier fires,
Old Yule shall have a lay: —
A prison-bard is once more free;
And, ere he yields his voice to thee,
His song a merry-song shall be!

Sir Wilfrid de Thorold [2] freely holds
What his stout sires held before —
Broad lands for plough, and fruitful folds, —
Though by gold he sets no store;
And he saith, from fen and woodland wolds,
From marish, heath, and moor, —
To feast in his hall,
Both free and thrall,
Shall come as they came of yore.

"Let the merry bells ring out!" saith he
To my lady of the Fosse; [3]
"We will keep the birth-eve joyfully
"Of our Lord who bore the cross!"

"Let the merry bells ring loud!" he saith
To saint Leonard's shaven prior; [4]
"Bid thy losel monks that patter of faith
"Shew works, and never tire."
Saith the lord of saint Leonard's: "The brotherhood
"Will ring and never tire
"For a beck or a nod of the Baron good;"—
Saith Sir Wilfrid: "They will — for hire!"

Then, turning to his daughter fair,
Who leaned on her father's carven chair, —
He said, — and smiled
On his peerless child, —
His jewel whose price no clerk could tell,
Though the clerk had told
Sea sands for gold ; —
For her dear mother's sake he loved her well, —
But more for the balm her tenderness
Had poured on his widowed heart's distress ; —
More, still more, for her own heart's grace
That so lovelily shone in her lovely face,
And drew all eyes its love to trace —
Left all tongues languageless ! —

He said, — and smiled
On his peerless child, —
" Sweet bird ! bid Hugh our seneschal
" Send to saint Leonard's, ere even-fall,
" A fat fed beeve, and a two-shear sheep,
" With a firkin of ale that a monk in his sleep
" May hear to hum, when it feels the broach,
" And wake up and swig, without reproach ! —

"And the nuns of the Fosse—for wassail-bread—
"Let them have wheat, both white and red;
"And a runlet of mead, with a jug of the wine
"Which the merchant-man vowed he brought
from the Rhine;
"And bid Hugh say that their bells must ring
"A peal loud and long,
"While we chaunt heart-song,
"For the birth of our heavenly king!"

Now merrily ring the lady-bells
Of the nunnery by the Fosse: —
Say the hinds, "Their silver music swells
"Like the blessed angels' syllables,
"At his birth who bore the cross!"

And solemnly swells saint Leonard's chime
And the great bell loud and deep: —
Say the gossips, "Let's talk of the holy time
"When the shepherds watched their sheep;
"And the Babe was born for all souls' crime
"In the weakness of flesh to weep." —
But, anon, shrills the pipe of the merry mime,
And their simple hearts upleap.

"God save your souls, good Christian folk!
"God save your souls from sin!—
"Blythe Yule is come—let us blythely joke!"—
Cry the mummers, ere they begin.

Then, plough-boy Jack, in kirtle gay, —
Though shod with clouted shoon, —
Stands forth the wilful maid to play
Who ever saith to her lover "Nay"—
When he sues for a lover's boon.

While Hob the smith with sturdy arm
Circleth the feignëd maid;
And, spite of Jack's assumed alarm,
Busseth his lips, like a lover warm,
And will not "Nay" be said.

Then loffe the gossips, as if wit
Were mingled with the joke:—
Gentles,—they were with folly smit,—
Natheless, their memories acquit
Of crime—these simple folk!

No harmful thoughts their revels blight,—
Devoid of bitter hate and spite,

They hold their merriment;—
And, till the chimes tell noon at night,
Their joy shall be unspent!

"Come haste ye to bold Thorold's hall,
"And crowd his kitchen wide;
"For there, he saith, both free and thrall
"Shall sport this good Yule-tide!

"Come hasten, gossips!" the mummers cry,
Throughout old Torksey town;
"We'll hasten!" they answer, joyfully,
The gossip and the clown.

Heigho! whence cometh that cheery shout?
'Tis the Yule-log troop,—a merry rout!
The gray old ash that so bravely stood,
The pride of the Past, in Thorney wood,[5]
They have levelled for honour of welcome Yule;
And kirtled Jack is placed astride:
On the log to the grunsel[6] he shall ride!

"Losels, yoke all! yoke to, and pull!"
Cries Dick the wright, on long-eared steed;

"He shall have thwack
"On lazy back,
"That yoketh him not, in time of need!"
A long wain-whip
Dick doth equip,
And with beans in the bladder at end of thong,
It seemeth to threaten strokes sturdy and strong;—
Yet clown and maid
Give eager aid, —
And all, as they rattle the huge block along,
Seem to court the joke
Of Dick's wain-whip stroke, —
Be it ever so smart, none thinks he hath wrong;—
Till with mirthsome glee,
The old ash tree
Hath come to the threshold of Torksey hall, —
Where its brave old heart
A glow shall impart
To the heart of each guest at the festival.

And through the porch, a jocund crowd,
They rush, with heart-born laughter loud;

And still the merry mimesters call,
With jest and gibe, "Laugh, losels all!"

Then in the laden sewers troop,
With plattered beef and foaming stoup: —
"Make merry, neighbours!" cries good Hugh,
The white-haired seneschal:
"Ye trow, bold Thorold welcomes you —
"Make merry, my masters, all!"

They pile the Yule-log on the hearth, —
Soak toasted crabs in ale;
And while they sip, their homely mirth
Is joyous as if all the earth
For man were void of bale!

And why should fears for future years
Mix jolly ale with thoughts of tears
When in the horn 'tis poured?
And why should ghost of sorrow fright
The bold heart of an English wight
When beef is on the board?

De Thorold's guests are wiser than
The men of mopish lore;
For round they push the smiling can,
And slice the plattered store.

And round they thrust the ponderous cheese,
And the loaves of wheat and rye:
None stinteth him for lack of ease—
For each a stintless welcome sees,
In the Baron's blythesome eye.

The Baron joineth the joyous feast—
But not in pomp or pride;
He smileth on the humblest guest
So gladsomely—all feel that rest
Of heart which doth abide
Where deeds of generousness attest
The welcome by the tongue professed,
Is not within belied.

And the Baron's beauteous child is there,
In her maiden peerlessness,—
Her eyes diffusing heart-light rare,

And smiles so sweetly debonair,
That all her presence bless.—

But wherefore paleth, soon, her cheek?
And why, with trembling, doth she seek
To shun her father's gaze?
And who is he for whom the crowd
Make ready room, and "Welcome" loud
With gleeful voices raise?

"Right welcome!" though the revellers shout,
They hail the minstrel "Stranger!"
And in the Baron's eye dwells doubt,
And his daughter's look thrills "danger!"

Though he seemeth meek the youth is bold,
And his speech is firm and free;
He saith he will carol a legend old,
Of a Norman lord of Torksey told:
He learnt it o'er the sea;
And he will not sing for the Baron's gold,
But for love of minstrelsy.

"Come, tune thy harp!" the Baron saith,
"And tell thy minstrel tale:

" It is too late to harbour wrath
" For the thieves in helm and mail:

" Our fathers' home again is ours!—
" Though Thorold is Saxon still,
" To a song of thy foreign troubadours
" He can list with right good will!"

A shout of glee rings to the roof,
And the revellers form a ring;
Then silent wait to mark what proof
Of skill with voice and string
The youthful stranger will afford.

Full soon he tunes each quivering chord,
And, with preamble wildly sweet
He doth the wondering listeners greet;—
Then strikes into a changeful chaunt
That fits his fanciful romaunt.

The Daughter of Plantagenet.

THE STRANGER MINSTREL'S TALE.

FYTTE THE FYRSTE.

'Tis midnight, and the broad full moon
Pours on the earth her silver noon;
Sheeted in white, like spectres of fear,
Their ghostly forms the towers uprear;
And their long dark shadows behind them are cast,
Like the frown of the cloud when the lightning
hath past.

The warder sleeps on the battlement,
And there is not a breeze to curl the Trent;
The leaf is at rest, and the owl is mute—
But list! awaked is the woodland lute:
The nightingale warbles her omen sweet
On the hour when the ladye her lover shall meet.

She waves her hand from the loophole high,
And watcheth, with many a struggling sigh,
And hearkeneth in doubt, and paleth with fear,—
Yet tremblingly trusts her true knight is near;—
And there skims o'er the river—or doth her heart doat?—
As with wing of the night-hawk—her lover's brave boat.

His noble form hath attained the strand,
And she waves again her small white hand;
And breathing to heaven, in haste, a prayer,
Softly glides down the lonely stair;
And there stands by the portal, all watchful and still,
Her own faithful damsel awaiting her will.

The midnight lamp gleams dull and pale,—
The maidens twain are weak and frail,—
But Love doth aid his votaries true,
While they the massive bolts undo,—
And a moment hath flown, and the warrior knight
Embraceth his love in the meek moonlight.

The knight his love-prayer, tenderly,
Thus breathed in his fair one's ear
" Oh! wilt thou not, my Agnes, flee?—
" And, quelling thy maiden fear,
" Away in the fleeting skiff with me,
" And, for aye, this lone heart cheer?"

" O let not bold Romara[7] seek"—
Soft answered his ladye-love,—
" A father's doating heart to break,
" For should I disdainful prove
" Of his high behests, his darling child
" Will thenceforth be counted a thing defiled;
" And the kindling eye of my martial sire
" Be robbed of its pride, and be quenched its fire:
" Nor long would true Romara deem
" The heart of his Agnes beat for him,
" And for him alone—if that heart, he knew,
" To its holiest law could be thus untrue."

His plume-crowned helm the warrior bows
Low o'er her shoulder fair,
And bursting sighs the grief disclose
His lips can not declare;

And swiftly glide the tears of love
Adown the ladye's cheek;—
Their deep commingling sorrows prove
The love they cannot speak!

The moon shines on them, as on things
She loves to robe with gladness,—
But all her light no radiance brings
Unto their hearts' dark sadness:
Forlornly, 'neath her cheerless ray,—
Bosom to bosom beating,—
In speechless agony they stay,
With burning kisses greeting;—
Nor reck they with what speed doth haste
The present hour to join the past.

"Ho! lady Agnes, lady dear!"
Her fearful damsel cries;
"You reckon not, I deeply fear,
"How swift the moontide flies!
"The surly warder will awake,
"The morning dawn, anon,—
"My heart beginneth sore to quake,—
"I fear we are undone!"

But Love is mightier than Fear:
The ladye hasteth not:
The magnet of her heart is near,
And peril is forgot!

She clingeth to her knight's brave breast
Like a lorn turtle-dove,
And 'mid the peril feeleth rest,—
The full, rapt rest of Love!

"I charge thee, hie thee hence, sir knight!"
The damsel shrilly cries;
"If this should meet her father's sight,
"By Heaven! my lady dies."

The warrior rouseth all his pride,
And looseth his love's caress,—
Yet slowness of heart doth his strength betide
As he looks on her loveliness:—
But again the damsel their love-dream breaks,—
And, self-reproachingly,
The knight his resolve of its fetters shakes,
And his spirit now standeth free.

Then, came the last, absorbing kiss,
  True Love can ne'er forego,—
That dreamy plenitude of bliss
  Or antepast of woe,—
That seeming child of Heaven, which at its birth
Briefly expires, and proves itself of earth.

The ladye hieth to her couch;—
  And when the morn appears,
The changes of her cheek avouch,
  Full virginly her fears;—
But her doating father can nought discern
  In the hues of the rose and the lily that chase
  Each other across her lovely face,—
Save a sweetness that softens his visage stern.

FYTTE THE SECONDE.

ROMARA'S skiff is on the Trent,
  And the stream is in its strength,—
For a surge, from its ocean-fountain sent,
  Pervades its giant length:[8]

Roars the hoarse heygre[9] in its course,
Lashing the banks with its wrathful force;
And dolefully echoes the wild-fowl's scream,
As the sallows are swept by the whelming stream;
And her callow young are hurled for a meal,
To the gorge of the barbel, the pike, and the eel:
The porpoise[10] heaves 'mid the rolling tide,
And, snorting in mirth, doth merrily ride,—
For he hath forsaken his bed in the sea,
To sup on the salmon, right daintily!

In Romara's breast a tempest raves:
He heeds not the rage of the furrowy waves:
Supremely his hopes and fears are set
On the image of Agnes Plantagenet:[11]
And though from his vision fade Gainsburgh's towers,
And the moon is beclouded, and darkness lours,
Yet the eye of his passion oft pierceth the gloom,
And beholds his Beloved in her virgin bloom—
Kneeling before the holy Rood,—
All clasped her hands,—
Beseeching the saints and angels good

That their watchful bands
Her knight may preserve from a watery tomb!

What deathful scream rends Romara's heart?—
Is it the bittern that, flapping the air,
Doth shriek in madness, and downward dart,
As if from the bosom of Death she would tear
Her perished brood,—or a shroud would have
By their side, in the depths of their river-grave?

Hark! hark! again!—'tis a human cry,
Like the shriek of a man about to die!
And its desolateness doth fearfully pierce
The billowy boom of the torrent fierce;
And, swift as a thought
Glides the warrior's boat
Through the foaming surge to the river's bank,
Where, lo!—by a branch of the osiers dank,
Clingeth one in agony
Uttering that doleful cry!

His silvery head of age upborne
Appeared above the wave;
So nearly was his strength outworn,
That all too late to save

Had been the knight, if another billow
Its force on his fainting frame, had bent,—
Nay, his feeble grasp by the drooping willow
The beat of a pulse might have fatally spent.

With eager pounce did Romara take
From the yawning wave its prey,—
But nought to his deliverer spake
The man with the head of gray:
And the warrior stripped, with needful haste,
The helpless one of his drenchëd vest,
And wrapt his own warm mantle round
The chill one in his deathly swound.

The sea-born strength of the stream is spent,
And Romara's boat outstrips its speed,—
For his stalwart arm to the oar is bent,
And swiftly the ebbing waves recede.

Divinely streaketh the morning-star
With a wavy light the rippling waters;
And the moon looks on from the west, afar,
And palely smiles, with her waning daughters,

The thin-strown stars, which their vigil keep
Till the orient sun shall awake from sleep.

The sun hath awoke; and in garments of gold
The turrets of Torksey are livingly rolled;
Afar, on Trent's margin, the flowery lea
Exhales her dewy fragrancy;
And gaily carols the matin lark,
As the warrior hastes to moor his bark.

Two menials hastened to the beach,
For signal none need they;
On the towers they kept a heedful watch
As the skiff glode on its way:

With silent step and breathless care
The rescued one they softly bear,
And bring him, at their lord's behest,
To a couch of silken pillowed rest.

The serfs could scarce avert their eye
From his manly form and mien,
As, with closëd lids, all reverendly,
He lay in peace, serene.

And Romara thought, as he gazing leant
O'er the slumberer's form, that so pure a trace
Of the spirit of Heaven with the earthly blent
Dwelt only there, and in Agnes' face.

The leech comes forth at the hour of noon,
And saith, that the sick from his deathly swoon
Will awake anon; and Romara's eye,
Uplit, betokens his heartfelt joy;
And again o'er the slumberer's couch he bows
Till, slowly, those peaceful lids unclose, —
When, long, with heavenward-fixëd gaze,
With lowly prayer and grateful praise,
The aged man, from death reprieved,
His bosom of its joy relieved. —

Then did Romara thus address
His gray guest, in his reverendness:

" Now, man of prayer come tell to me
" Some spell of thy holy mystery!
" Some vision hast had of the Virgin bright, —
" Or message, conveyed from the world of light,

" By the angels of love who in purity stand
" 'Fore the throne of our Lord in the heavenly land?

" I hope, when I die, to see them there:
" For I love the angels so holy and fair:
" And often, I trust, my prayer they greet
" With smiles, when I kneel and kiss their feet
" In the missal, my mother her weeping child gave,
" But a day or two ere she was laid in the grave.

" Sage man of prayer, come tell to me
" What holy shapes in sleep they see
" Who love the blest saints and serve them well!
" I pray thee, sage man, to Romara tell,
" For a guerdon, thy dreams, — sith, to me thou hast said
" No thanks that I rescued thy soul from the dead."

But, when the aged man arose
And met Romara's wistful eye, —
What accents shall the change disclose
That marked his visage, fearfully? —
From joy to grief and deepest dole,
From radiant hope to dark presage

Of future ills beyond control —
Hath passed, the visage of the sage.

" Son of an honoured line, I grieve,"
Outspake the reverend seer,
" That I no guerdon thee can give
" But words of woe and fear! —
" Thy sun is setting! — and thy race,
" In thee, their goodly heir,
" Shall perish, nor a feeble trace
" Their fated name declare! —
" Thy love is fatal: fatal, too,
" This act of rescue brave —
" For, him who from destruction drew
" My life, no arm can save!"

He said, — and took his lonely way
Far from Romara's towers. —
His fateful end from that sad day
O'er Torksey's chieftain lowers: —
Yet, vainly, in his heart a shrine
Hope builds for love, — with faith; —
Alas! for him with frown malign
Waiteth the grim king Death!

FYTTE THE THYRDE.

PLANTAGENET hath dungeons deep
Beneath his castled halls; —
Plantagenet awakes from sleep
To count his dungeoned thralls.

Alone, with the torch of blood-red flame,
The man of blood descends;
And the fettered captives curse his name,
As through the vaults he wends. —

His caverns are visited, all, save one,
The deepest, and direst in gloom, —
Where his father, doomed by a demon son,
Abode in a living tomb. —

" I bring thee bread and water, sire!
" Brave usury for thy gold!
" I fear my filial zeal will tire
" To visit, soon, thy hold!"

Thus spake the fiendish-hearted lord,
And wildly laughed, in scorn:
Like thunder round the cell each word
By echoing fiends is borne, —
But not a human heart is there
The baron's scorn or hate to fear!

And the captives tell, as he passeth again, —
That tyrant, in his rage, —
How an angel hath led the aged man
To his heavenly heritage!

The wrathful baron little recked
That angel was his darling child;
Or knew his dark ambition checked
By her who oft his rage beguiled, —
By her on whom he ever smiled: —
This had he known, from that dread hour,
His darling's smile had lost its power, —
And his own hand, without remorse,
Had laid her at his feet a corse! —

Plantagenet's banners in pride are borne
To the sound of pipe and drum!

And his mailëd bands, with the dawn of morn,
To Romara's walls are come.
" We come not as foes," the herald saith, —
" But we bring Plantagenet's shriven faith
" That thou, Romara, in thine arms
" Shall soon enfold thy true love's charms:
" Let no delay thy joy betide! —
" Thy Agnes soon shall be thy bride!"

The raven croaks as Torksey's lord
Attends that bannered host;
But the lover is deaf to the omen-bird —
The fatal moat is crossed!

" Ride, ride;" saith the baron, — " thy ladye fain
" And the priest — by the altar wait!" —
And the spearmen seize his bridle-rein,
And hurry him to his fate.

" A marriage by torchlight!" the baron said;
" This stair to the altar leads!
" We patter our prayers, 'mong the mouldering dead, —
" And there we tell our beads!"

Along the caverned dungeon's gloom
The tyrant strides in haste;
And, powerless, to his dreadful doom
The victim followeth fast.
The dazëd captives quake and stare
At the sullen torch's blood-red glare,
And the lover starts aghast
At the deathlike forms they wear!

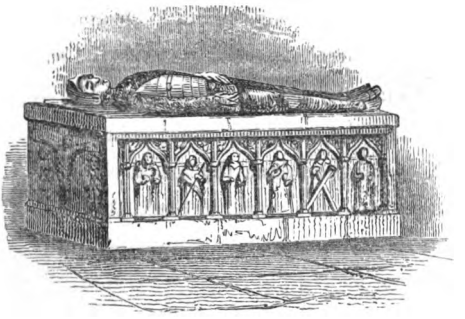
Too late, the truth upon him breaks! —
Romara's heart is faint! —
"Behold thy bride!" the baron shrieks —
"Wilt hear the wedding chaunt?
"This chain once bound my father here,
"Who would have found his grave —
"The cursed dotard! — 'neath the wave, —
"Had not thy hateful hand been near. —
"Be this the bride thou now shalt wed!
"This dungeon dank thy bridal bed! —
"And when thy youthful blood shall freeze
"In death, — may fiends thy spirit seize!" —

Plantagenet hath minions fell
Who do their master's bidding well: —

Few days Romara pines in dread: —
His soul is with the sainted dead! —

Plantagenet hath reached his bourne!
What terrors meet his soul forlorn
And full of stain, — I may not say: —
Reveal them shall the Judgment Day! —

Her orisons at matin hour,
At noon, and eve, and midnight toll,
For him, doth tearful Agnes pour! —
Jesu Maria! sain his soul!



THE

BARON'S YULE FEAST.

A

Christmas Rhyme.

Canto II.

Symphonious notes of dulcet plaint
Followed the stranger minstrel's chaunt;
And, when his sounding harp was dumb,
The crowd, with loud applausive hum,
Gave hearty guerdon for his strain;
While some with sighs expressed what pain
Had pierced their simple bosoms thorow
To hear his song of death and sorrow.

"Come bear the mead-cup to our guest,"
Said Thorold to his daughter;
"We thought to hear, at our Yule feast,
"A lay of mirth and laughter;

"But, to thy harp, thou well hast sung
"A song that may impart,
"For future hours, to old and young,
"Deep lessons to the heart.
"Yet, should not life be all a sigh!
"Good Snell, do thou a burthen try
"Shall change our sadness into joy:
"Such as thou trollest in blythe mood,
"On days of sunshine in the wood.
"Tell out thy heart withouten fear —
"For none shall stifle free thoughts here!
"But, bear the mead-cup, Edith sweet!
"We crave our stranger guest will greet
"All hearts, again, with minstrelsy,
"When Snell hath trolled his mirth-notes free!"

Fairer than fairest flower that blows, —
Sweeter than breath of sweetest rose, —
Still on her cheek, in lustre left,
The tear the minstrel's tale had reft
From its pearl-treasure in the brain —
The limbec where, by mystic vein,
From the heart's fountains are distilled
Those crystals, when 'tis overfilled, —

With downcast eye, and trembling hands,
Edith before the stranger stands —
  Stranger to all but her!
Though well the baron notes his brow,
While the young minstrel kneeleth low —
  Love's grateful worshipper! —
And doth with lips devout impress
The hand of his fair ministress!

Yet, was the deed so meekly done, —
His guerdon seemed so fairly won, —
The tribute he to beauty paid
  So deeply all believed deserved, —
That nought of blame Sir Wilfrid said,
  Though much his thoughts from meekness
    swerved.

Impatience, soon, their faces tell
To hear the song of woodman Snell,
  Among the festive crew;
And, soon, their old and honest frere,
Elated by the good Yule cheer,
In untaught notes, but full and clear,
  Thus told his heart-thoughts true: —

The Woodman's Song.

I WOULD not be a crownëd king,
For all his gaudy gear;
I would not be that pampered thing,
His gew-gaw gold to wear:
But I would be where I can sing
Right merrily, all the year;
Where forest treen,
All gay and green,
Full blythely do me cheer.

I would not be a gentleman,
For all his hawks and hounds, —
For fear the hungry poor should ban
My halls and wide-parked grounds:
But I would be a merry man,
Among the wild wood sounds, —
Where free birds sing,
And echoes ring
While my axe from the oak rebounds.

I would not be a shaven priest,
For all his sloth-won tythe:
But while to me this breath is leased,
And these old limbs are lithe, —
Ere Death hath marked me for his feast,
And felled me with his scythe, —
I'll troll my song,
The leaves among,
All in the forest blythe.

"Well done, well done!" bold Thorold cried,
When the woodman ceased to sing;
"By'r Lady! it warms the Saxon tide
"In our veins to hear thee bring
"These English thoughts so freely out!
"Thy health, good Snell!" — and a merry shout
For honest boldness, truth, and worth,
The baron's grateful guests sent forth.

Silence like grave-yard air, again,
Pervades the festive space:
All list for another minstrel strain;
And the youth, with merrier face,

But tender notes, thus half-divulged
The passion which his heart indulged: —

The Minstrel's Song.

O CHOOSE thou the maid with the gentle blue eye,
That speaketh so softly, and looketh so shy;
Who weepeth for pity,
To hear a love ditty,
And marketh the end with a sigh.

If thou weddest a maid with a wide staring look,
Who babbleth as loud as the rain-swollen brook,
Each day for the morrow
Will nurture more sorrow, —
Each sun paint thy shadow a-crook.

The maid that is gentle will make a kind wife;
The magpie that prateth will stir thee to strife:
'Twere better to tarry,
Unless thou canst marry
To sweeten the bitters of life!

What fires the youthful minstrel's lay
  Lit in De Thorold's eyes,
It needs not, now, I soothly say :
Sweet Edith had softly stolen away,—
  And 'mid his own surprise,
Blent with the boisterous applause
That, instant, to the rafters rose,
The baron his jealous thought forgot.
Quickly, sithence a jocund note
Was fairly struck in every mind,
And jolly ale its power combined
To fill all hearts with deeper glee,—
All wished for gleeful minstrelsy ;
And every eye was shrewdly bent
On one whose caustic merriment
At many a blythe Yule-tide had bin

Compelling cause of mirthful grin
To ancient Torksey's rustic folk.

Full soon this sturdy summons broke
From sire and son, and maid and mother :—
"Ho, ho! saint Leonard's fat lay brother!
"Why dost thou in the corner peep,
"And sipple as if half asleep
"Thou wert with this good nappy ale?
"Come, rouse thee! for thy sly old tale
"Of the Miller of Roche and the hornless devil,
"We'll hear, or we leave our Yule-night revel!
"Thy folded cloak come cast aside!—
"Beneath it thou dost thy rebeck hide—
"It is thy old trick—we know it well—
"Pledge all! and thy ditty begin to tell!"
"Pledge all, pledge all!" the baron cried;
"Let mirth be free at good Yule-tide!"

Then, forth the lay brother his rebeck drew,
And athwart the triple string
The bow in gamesome mood he threw,—
His joke-song preluding;—
Soon, with sly look, the burly man,
In burly tones his tale began.

The Miller of Roche.[12]

THE LAY BROTHER OF SAINT LEONARD'S TALE.

O THE Prior of Roche
Was without reproach
While with saintly monks he chanted ;
But when from the mass
He had turned his face,
The prior his saintship scanted.

O the Miller of Roche,—
I swear and avouch,—
Had a wife of nut-brown beauty ;
And to shrive her,—they say,—
The prior, each day,
Came with zeal to his ghostly duty.

But the neighbouring wives,
Who ne'er shrove in their lives,—
Such wickedness Sathanas whispers!—
Said the black-cloaked prior
By the miller's log fire,
Oft tarried too late for vespers!

O the thunder was loud,
And the sky wore a shroud,
And the lightning blue was gleaming;
And the foaming flood,
Where the good mill stood,
Pell-mell o'er the dam was teeming.

O the Miller, that night,
Toiled on in a fright, —
Though, through terror, few bushels he grinded!
Yet, although he'd stayed long,
The storm was so strong
That full loath to depart was he minded.

Lo! at midnight a jolt,
As loud as the bolt
Of the thunder on high that still rumbled,
Assailed the mill-doors,
And burst them, perforce, —
And in a drenched beggar-lad stumbled!

" Saint Luke and saint John
" Save the ground we stand on" —

Cried the Miller, — " but ye come in a hurry;"
While the lad, turning pale,
'Gan to weep and to wail,
And to patter this pitiful story:

" Goodman Miller, I pray,
" Believe what I say, —
" For, as surely as thou art a sinner, —
" Since the break of the morn
" I have wandered forlorn,
" And have neither had breakfast nor dinner!"

O the Miller looked sad,
And cried, " Good lack, my lad!
" But ye tell me a dolorous ditty! —
" And ye seem in sad plight
" To travel to-night: —
" The sight o' ye stirs up one's pity!

" Go straight to my cot,
" And beg something that's hot, —
" For ye look very haggard and hollow: —
" The storm's nearly o'er;
" I will not grind much more, —
" And when I have done, I will follow.

" Keep by the brook-side!
" The path is not wide —
" But ye cannot soon stray, if ye mind it; —
" At the foot of the hill,
" Half a mile from the mill,
" Stands my cottage: — ye can't fail to find it."

Then out the lad set,
All dripping with wet, —
But the skies around him seemed brighter;
And he went gaily on, —
For his burthen was gone, —
And his heart in his bosom danced lighter.

Adown by the brook
His travel he took,
And soon raught the Miller's snug dwelling; —
But, what he saw ere
He was admitted there —
By Saint Bridget! — I must not be telling!

Thus much I may say —
That the cot was of clay,

And the light was through wind-cracks ejected;
And he placed close his eye,
And peeped in, so sly, —
And saw — what he never expected!

O the lad 'gan to fear
That the Miller would appear, —
And, to him, this strange sight would be vexing;
So he, first, sharply coughed,
And, then, knocked very soft, —
Lest his summons should be too perplexing.

But, I scorn to think harm! —
So pass by all alarm,
And trembling, and bustle, and terror,
Occasioned within:
The first stone at sin
Let him cast who, himself, hath no error!

In inquisitive mood,
The eaves-dropper stood,
By the wind-cracks still keeping his station;
Till, half-choked with fear,
A voice cried, "Who's there?" —
Cried the beggar, "Mary grant ye salvation! —

" I'm à poor beggar-lad,
" Very hungry and sad,
" Who have travelled in rain and in thunder;
" I am soaked, through and through" —
Cried the voice, " Perhaps 'tis true —
" But who's likely to help thee, I wonder?

" Here's a strange time of night
" To put folk in a fright,
" By waking them up from their bolsters! —
" Honest folk, by Saint Paul!
" Abroad never crawl,
" At the gloom-hour of night—when the owl stirs!"

But the Miller now came,
And, hearing his dame
So sharply the beggar-lad scolding,
Said, " Open, sweet Joan!
" And I'll tell thee, anon, —
" When thy brown cheek, once more, I'm beholding,

" Why this poor lad is found
" So late on our ground —

"Haste, my pigeon! — for here there's hard bedding!" —
So the door was unbarred; —
But the wife she frowned hard,
As the lad, by the door, thrust his head in.

And she looked very cold
While her lord the tale told;
And then she made oath, by our Lady, —
Such wandering elves
Might provide for themselves —
For she would get no supper ready!

O the Miller waxed wroth,
And vowed, by his troth, —
While the beggar slunk into a corner, —
If his termagant wife
Did not end her ill strife,
He would change words for blows, he'd forewarn her!

O the lad he looked sly,
And with mischievous eye,

Cried, "Bridle your wrath, Goodman Grinder!—
"Don't be in a pet,—
"For I don't care a fret!—
"Your wife, in a trice, will be kinder!

"In the stars I have skill,
"And their powers, at my will,
"I can summon, with food to provide us:
"Say,—what d'ye choose?
"I pray, don't refuse:—
"Neither hunger nor thirst shall betide us!"

O the Miller he frowned,
And rolled his eyes round,
And seemed not the joke to be liking;
But the lad did not heed:
He was at his strange deed,
And the table was chalking and striking!

With scrawls straight and crookt,
And with signs square and hookt,
With the lord of each house, or the lady,
The table he filled,
Like a clerk 'ith' stars skilled,—
And, striking, cried "Presto! be ready!—

"A jug of spiced wine
"'S in the box, — I divine!
"Ask thy wife for the key, and unlock it! —
"Nay, stop!" the lad said;
"We shall want meat and bread;"
And the chalk took again from his pocket.

O the lad he looked wise,
And, in scholarly guise,
Completed his horary question: —
"A brace of roast ducks
"Thou wilt find in the box,
"With the wine — sure as I am a Christian! —

"And a white wheaten loaf; —
"Quick! proceed to the proof!" —
Cried the beggar, — while Grist stood stark staring; —
Though the lad's weasel eyes
Shone so wondrously wise,
That to doubt him seemed sin over-daring!

O the Miller's wife, Joan,
Turning pale, 'gan to groan;

But the Miller, arousing his spirits,
Said, "Hand me the key,
"And our luck we will see —
"A faint heart no fortune inherits."

But, — Gramercy! — his looks —
When he opened the box,
And at what he saw in it stood wondering!
How his sturdy arm shook,
While the wine-jug he took,
And feared he would break it with blundering!

Faith and troth! at the last,
On the table Grist placed
The wine and the ducks — hot and smoking!
Yet he felt grievous shy
His stomach to try
With cates of a wizard's own cooking!

But, with hunger grown fell,
The lad sped so well,
That Grist was soon tempted to join in;
While Joan sat apart,
And looked sad at heart,
And some fearful mishap seemed divining!

O the lad chopped away,
And smiling so gay,
Told stories to make his host merry: —
How the Moon kittened stars, —
And how Venus loved Mars,
And often went to see him in a wherry!

O the Miller he laughed,
And the liquor he quaffed;
But the beggar new marvels was hatching: —
Quoth he "I'm a clerk,
"And I swear, by saint Mark,
"That the Devil from hell I'll be fetching!" —

O the wife she looked scared,
And wildly Grist stared,
And cried, "Nay, my lad, nay, — thou'rt not able!" —
But the lad plied his chalk,
And muttered strange talk —
Till Grist drew his stool from the table!

Then the lad quenched the rush,
And cried, "Bring a gorse-bush,

"And under the caldron now kindle!" —
But the Miller cried, "Nay!
"Give over, I pray!" —
For his courage began fast to dwindle.

Quoth the lad, "I must on
"Till my conjuring's done;
"To break off just now would be ruin:
"So fetch me the thorns, —
"And a devil without horns,
"In the copper I soon will be brewing!" —

O the Miller he shook
For fear his strange cook
Should, indeed and in truth, prove successful;
But feeling ashamed
That his pluck should be blamed,
Strove to smother his heart-quake distressful.

So the fuel he brought,
And said he feared nought
Of the Devil being brewed in his copper:
He'd as quickly believe
Nick would sit in his sieve,
Or dance 'mong the wheat in his hopper: —

And yet, lest strange ill,
From such conjuring skill,
Should arise, and their souls be in danger, —
He would have his crab-stick,
And would show my lord Nick
Some tricks to which he was a stranger!

O the lad 'gan to raise
'Neath the caldron a blaze, —
While the Miller, his crab-cudgel grasping,
Stood on watch, for his life! —
But his terrified wife
Her hands — in devotion — was clasping!

When the copper grew warm,
Quoth the lad, "Lest some harm
"From the visit of Nick be betiding, —
"Set open the door,
"And not long on the floor
"Will the Goblin of Hell be abiding!"

Quickly so did the host,
And returned to his post, —

Uplifting his cudgel with trembling:—
His strength was soon proved,—
For the copper-lid moved!—
When Grist's fears grew too big for dissembling.

Turning white as the wall,
His staff he let fall,—
While the Devil from the caldron ascended,—
And, all on a heap,—
With a flying leap,
On the fear-stricken Miller descended!

In dread lest his soul,
In the Devil's foul goal,
Should be burnt to a spiritual cinder,—
Grist grabbed the Fiend's throat,
And his grisly eyes smote,—
Till Nick's face seemed a platter of tinder!

Yea, with many a thwack,
Grist battered Nick's back,—
Nor spared Satan's portly abdomen!—
Hot Nick had lain cold
By this time—but his hold
Grist lost, through the screams of his woman!

While up from the floor,
And out, at the door,
Went the Fiend, with the skip of a dancer!
He seemed panic-struck, —
Or, doubted his luck, —
For he neither staid question nor answer!

"Grist!" the beggar-lad cried,
"Lay your trembling aside,
"And tell me, my man, how ye like him.
"'Twas well ye were cool:
"He'd have proved ye a fool, —
"Had ye dar'd with the cudgel to strike him!"

"By saint Martin!" Grist said,
And, scratching his head,
Seemed pondering between good and evil, —
"I could swear and avoueh
"'Twas the Prior of Roche, —
"If thou hadst not said 'twas the Devil!"

And, in deed and in sooth, —
Though a marvellous truth, —

Yet such was the Fiend's revelation!—
But think it not strange
He should choose such a change:—
'Tis much after his old occupation:—

An angel of light,
'Tis his darling delight
To be reckoned—'tis very well tested:—
I argue, therefore,
'Twas not sinning much more,
In the garb of a Prior to be vested.

Though, with wink, nod, and smile—
O the world's very vile!—
Grist's neighbours told tales unbelieving,—
How the beggar, so shrewd,
Monk and supper had viewed,
And produced 'em!—the Miller deceiving!

But I do not belong
To that heretic throng
Who measure their faith with their eyesight:—
Thus much I may say—
Grist's cottage of clay
Never, now, doth the Prior of Roche visit:—

But, the sly beggar-lad,
Be he hungry or sad,
A remedy finds for each evil
In the Miller's good cheer,
Any day of the year; —
And though Joan looketh shy — *she is civil!*

The tale was rude, but pleased rude men;
And clamorous many a clown grew, when
The rebeck ceased to thrill:
Ploughboy and neatherd, shepherd swain,
Gosherd and swineherd, — all were fain
To prove their tuneful skill.

But, now, Sir Wilfrid waved his hand,
And gently stilled the jarring band:
" What ho!" he cried, " what ails your throats?
' Be these your most melodious notes?
" Forget ye that to-morrow morn
" Old Yule-day and its sports return, —
" And that your freres, from scrogg and carr,[13]
" From heath and wold, and fen, afar,

" Will come to join ye in your glee?
" Husband your mirth and minstrelsy,
" And let some goodly portion be
" Kept for their entertainment meet.
" Meanwhile, let frolic guide your feet,
" And warm your winter blood!
" Good night to all! — For His dear sake
" Who bore our sin, if well we wake,
" We'll join to banish care and sorrow
" With mirth and sport again to-morrow!"
And forth the Baron good
Passed from his chair, midst looks of love
That showed how truly was enwove
Full, free, and heartfelt gratitude
For kindly deeds, in bosoms rude.

The broad hall-doors were open cast,
And, smiling, forth De Thorold passed.
Yet, was the crowning hour unflown —
Enjoyment's crowning hour! —
A signal note the pipe hath blown,
And a maiden at the door
Craves curtsied leave, with roseate blush,
To bring the sacred missel-bush.

Gaily a younker leads the fair,
Proud of his dimpled, blushing care:
All clap their hands, both old and young,
And soon the misseltoe is hung
In the mid-rafters, overhead;
And, while the agile dance they thread,
Such honey do the plough-lads seize
From lips of lasses as the bees
Ne'er sip from sweetest flowers of May.

All in the rapture of their play, —
While shrilly swells the mirthsome pipe,
And merrily their light feet trip, —
Leave we the simple happy throng
Their mirth and rapture to prolong.

THE

BARON'S YULE FEAST.

A

Christmas Rhyme.

Canto III.

Mirth-verse from thee, rude leveller!
Of late, thy dungeon-harpings were
Of discontent and wrong;
And we, the Privileged, were banned
For cumber-grounds of fatherland,
In thy drear prison-song.

What fellowship hast thou with times
When love-thralled minstrels chaunted rhymes
At feast, in feudal hall, —
And peasant churls, a saucy crew,
Fantastic o'er their wassail grew,
Forgetful of their thrall? —

Lordlings, your scorn awhile forbear, —
And with the homely Past compare
Your tinselled show and state!
Mark, if your selfish grandeurs cold
On human hearts so firm a hold
For ye, and yours, create
As they possessed, whose breasts though rude
Glowed with the warmth of brotherhood
For all who toiled, through youth and age,
T' enrich their force-won heritage!

Mark, if ye feel your swollen pride
Secure, ere ye begin to chide!
Then, lordlings, though ye may discard
The measures I rehearse,
Slight not the lessons of the bard —
The moral of his verse. —

But *we* will dare thy verse to chide!
Wouldst re-enact the Barmecide,
And taunt our wretchedness
With visioned feast, and song, and dance, —
While, daily, our grim heritance
Is famine and distress?

Hast thou forgot thy pledges stern,
Never from Suffering's cause to turn,
But — to the end of life —
Against Oppression's ruthless band
Still unsubduable to stand,
A champion in the strife?

Think'st thou we suffer less, or feel
To-day's soul-piercing wounds do heal
The wounds of months and years?
Or that our eyes so long have been
Familiar with the hunger keen
Our babes endure, we gaze serene —
Strangers to scalding tears? —

Ah no! my brothers, not from me
Hath faded solemn memory
Of all your bitter grief:
This heart its pledges doth renew —
To its last pulse it will be true
To beat for your relief.

My rhymes are trivial, but my aim
Deem ye not purposeless:
I would the homely truth proclaim —

That times which knaves full loudly blame
For feudal haughtiness
Would put the grinding crew to shame
Who prey on your distress.

O that my simple lay might tend
To kindle some remorse
In your oppressors' souls, and bend
Their wills a cheerful help to lend
And lighten Labour's curse!

A night of snow the earth hath clad
With virgin mantle chill;
But in the sky the sun looks glad, —
And blythely o'er the hill,
From fen and wold, troops many a guest
To sing and smile at Thorold's feast.

And oft they bless the bounteous sun
That smileth on the snow;
And oft they bless the generous one
Their homes that bids them fro

To glad their hearts with merry cheer,
When Yule returns, in winter drear.

How joyously the lady bells
Shout — though the bluff north-breeze
Loudly his boisterous bugle swells!
And though the brooklets freeze,
How fair the leafless hawthorn-tree
Waves with its hoar-frost tracery!
While sun-smiles throw o'er stalks and stems
Sparkles so far transcending gems —
The bard would gloze who said their sheen
Did not out-diamond
All brightest gauds that man hath seen
Worn by earth's proudest king or queen,
In pomp and grandeur throned!

Saint Leonard's monks have chaunted mass,
And clown's and gossip's laughing face
Is turned unto the porch, —
For now comes mime and motley fool,
Guarding the dizened Lord Misrule
With mimic pomp and march;

And the burly Abbot of Unreason
Forgets not that the blythe Yule season
Demands his paunch at church;
And he useth his staff
While the rustics laugh, —
And, still, as he layeth his crosier about,
Laugheth aloud each clownish lowt, —
And the lowt, as he laugheth, from corbels grim,
Sees carven apes ever laughing at him!

Louder and wilder the merriment grows,
For the hobby-horse comes, and his rider he throws!
And the dragon's roar,
As he paweth the floor,
And belcheth fire
In his demon ire,
When the Abbot the monster takes by the nose,
Stirreth a tempest of uproar and din —
Yet none surmiseth the joke is a sin —
For the saints, from the windows, in purple and gold,
With smiles, say the gossips, Yule games behold;

And, at Christmas, the Virgin all divine
Smileth on sport, from her silver shrine!
"Come forth, come forth! it is high noon,"
Cries Hugh the seneschal;
"My masters, will ye ne'er have done?
"Come forth unto the hall!"—

'Tis high Yule-tide in Torksey hall:
Full many a trophy bedecks the wall
Of prowess in field and wood;
Blent with the buckler and grouped with the spear
Hang tusks of the boar, and horns of the deer —
But De Thorold's guests beheld nought there
That scented of human blood.
The mighty wassail horn suspended
From the tough yew-bow, at Hastings bended,
With wreaths of bright holly and ivy bound,
Were perches for falcons that shrilly screamed,
While their look with the lightning of anger gleamed,
As they chided the fawning of mastiff and hound,
That crouched at the feet of each peasant guest,
And asked, with their eyes, to share the feast.

Sir Wilfrid's carven chair of state
'Neath the dais is gently elevate, —
But his smile bespeaks no lordly pride:
Sweet Edith sits by her loved sire's side,
And five hundred guests, some free, some thrall,
Sit by the tables along the wide hall,
Each with his platter, and stout drink-horn, —
They count on good cheer this Christmas morn!

Not long they wait, not long they wish —
The trumpet peals, — and the kingly dish, —
The head of the brawny boar,
Decked with rosemary and laurels gay,—
Upstarting, they welcome, with loud huzza,
As their fathers did, of yore!
And they point to the costard he bears in his mouth,
And vow the huge pig,
So luscious a fig,
Would not gather to grunch in the daintiful South!

Strike up, strike up, a louder chime,
Ye minstrels in the loft!
Strike up! it is no fitting time
For drowsy strains and soft, —

When sewers threescore
Have passed the hall door,
And the tables are laden with roast and boiled,
And carvers are hasting, lest all should be spoiled;
And gossips' tongues clatter
More loudly than platter,
And tell of their marvel to reckon the sorts: —

Ham by fat capon, and beef by green worts;
Ven'son from forest, and mutton from fold;
Brawn from the oak-wood, and hare from the wold;
Wild-goose from fen, and tame from the lea;
And plumëd dish from the heronry —
With choicest apples 'twas featly rimmed,
And stood next the flagons with malmsey brimmed, —
Near the knightly swan, begirt with quinces,
Which the gossips said was a dish for princes, —
Though his place was never to stand before
The garnished head of the royal boar!

Puddings of plumbs and mince-pies, placed
In plenty along the board, met taste

Of gossip and maiden, — nor did they fail
To sip, now and then, of the double brown ale —
That ploughman and shepherd vowed and sware
Was each drop so racy, and sparkling, and rare —
No outlandish Rhenish could with it compare !

Trow ye they stayed till the meal was done
To pledge a health ? Degenerate son
Of friendly sires ! a health thrice-told
Each guest had pledged to fellowships old, —
Untarrying eager mouth to wipe,
And across the board with hearty gripe
Joining rough hands, — ere the meal was o'er : —
Hearts and hands went with "healths" in the days of yore !

The meal is o'er, — though the time of mirth,
Each brother feels, is but yet in its birth : —
" Wassail, wassail ! " the seneschal cries ;
And the spicy bowl rejoiceth all eyes,
When before the baron beloved 'tis set,
And he dippeth horn, and thus doth greet
The honest hearts around him met : —

"Health to ye all, my brothers good!
"All health and happiness!
"Health to the absent of our blood!
"May Heaven the suffering bless, —
"And cheer their hearts who lie at home
"In pain, now merry Yule hath come!
"My jolly freres, all health!"

The shout is loud and long, — but tears
Glide quickly from some eyes, while ears
List whispering sounds of stealth
That tell how the noble Thorold hath sent,
To palsied widow and age-stricken hind,
Clothing and food, and brother-words kind, —
Cheering their aching languishment!

"Wassail, wassail!" Sir Wilfrid saith, —
"Push round the brimming bowl! —
"Art thou there, minstrel? — By my faith,
"All list to hear thee troll,
"Again, some goodly love-lorn verse! —
"Begin thy ditty to rehearse, —
"And take, for guerdon, wishes blythe —
"'Less thou wilt take red gold therewith!"

Red gold the minstrel saith he scorneth, —
But, now the merry Yule returneth,
For love of Him whom angels sung,
And love of one his burning tongue
Is fain to name, but may not tell, —
Once more, unto the harp's sweet swell,
A knightly chanson he will sing, —
And, straight, he struck the throbbing string.

Sir Raymond and the False Palmer.

THE STRANGER MINSTREL'S SECOND TALE.

Sir Raymond de Clifford, a gallant band
Hath gathered to fight in the Holy Land ;
And his lady's heart is sinking in sorrow,—
For the knight and his lances depart on the morrow!

" Oh, wherefore, noble Raymond, tell, " —
His lovely ladye weeping said, —
" With lonely sorrow must I dwell,
" When but three bridal moons have fled ? "

Sir Raymond kissed her pale, pale cheek,
And strove, with a warrior's pride,
While an answer of love he essayed to speak,
His flooding tears to hide.

But an image rose in his heated brain,
That shook his heart with vengeful pain,
And anger flashed in his rolling eye,
While his ladye looked on him tremblingly.

Yet, he answered not in wrathful haste, —
But clasped his bride to his manly breast;
And with words of tender yet stately dress,
Thus strove to banish her heart's distress: —

"De Burgh hath enrolled him with Philip of France, —
"Baron Hubert, — who challenged De Clifford's lance,
"And made him the scoff of the burgher swine,
"When he paid his vows at the Virgin's shrine.

"Oh, ask me not, love, to tarry in shame, —
"Lest 'craven' be added to Raymond's name!

"To Palestine hastens my mortal foe, —
"And I with our Lion's Heart will go !

"Nay, Gertrude, repeat not thy sorrowing tale !
"Behold in my casque the scallop-shell, —
"And see on my shoulder the Holy Rood —
"The pledge of my emprize — bedyed in blood !

"Thou wouldst not, love, I should be forsworn,
"Nor the stain on my honour be tamely borne :
"Do thou to the saints, each passing day,
"For Raymond and royal Richard pray, —

"While they rush to the rescue, for God's dear Son ;
"And soon, for thy Raymond, the conqu'ror's meed, —
"By the skill of this arm, and the strength of my steed, —
"From the Paynim swart shall be nobly won.

"Thou shalt not long for De Clifford mourn,
"Ere he to thy bosom of love return ;
"When blind to the lure of the red-cross bright,
"He will bask, for life, in thy beauty's light !"

The morn in the radiant east arose: —
The Red-cross Knight hath spurred his steed
That courseth as swift as a falcon's speed: —
To the salt-sea shore Sir Raymond goes.

Soon, the sea he hath crossed, to Palestine;
And there his heart doth chafe and pine, —
For Hubert de Burgh is not in that land:
He loitereth in France, with Philip's band.

But De Clifford will never a recreant turn,
While the knightly badge on his arm is borne;
And long, beneath the Syrian sun,
He fasted and fought, and glory won.

His Gertrude, alas! like a widow pines;
And though on her castle the bright sun shines,
She sees not its beams, — but in loneliness prays,
Through the live-long hours of her weeping days. —

Twelve moons have waned, and the morn is come
When, a year before, from his meed-won home
Sir Raymond went: — At the castle gate
A reverend Palmer now doth wait.

He saith he hath words for the ladye's ear;
And he telleth, in accents dread and drear,
Of De Clifford's death in the Holy Land,
At Richard's side, by a Saracen's hand.

And he gave to the ladye, when thus he had spoken, —
Of Sir Raymond's fall a deathly token:
'Twas a lock of his hair all stained with blood,
Entwined on a splinter of Holy Rood. —

Then the Palmer in haste from the castle sped;
And from gloomy morn to weary night,
Lorn Gertrude, in her widowed plight,
Weepeth and waileth the knightly dead. —

Three moons have waned, and the Palmer, again,
By Gertrude stands, and smileth fain;
Nor of haste, nor of death, speaks the Palmer, now;
Nor doth sadness or sorrow bedim his brow.

He softly sits by the ladye's side,
And vaunteth his deeds of chivalrous pride;
Then lisps, in her secret ear, of things
Which deeply endanger the thrones of kings:

From Philip of France, he saith, he came,
To treat with Prince John, whom she must not name;
And he, in fair France, hath goodly lands, —
And a thousand vassals there wait his commands. —

The ladye liked her gallant guest, —
For he kenned the themes that pleased her best;
And his tongue, in silken measures skilled,
With goodly ditties her memory filled.

Thus the Palmer the ladye's ear beguiles, —
Till Gertrude her sorrow exchangeth for smiles;
And when from the castle the Palmer went,
She watched his return, from the battlement. —

Another moon doth swell and wane: —
But how slowly it waneth!
How her heart now paineth
For sight of the Palmer again!

But the Palmer comes, and her healëd heart
Derideth pain and sorrow:
She pledgeth the Palmer, and smirketh smart,
And saith, "we 'll wed to-morrow!" —

The morrow is come, and at break of day,
'Fore the altar, the abbot, in holy array,
Is joining the Palmer's and Gertrude's hands, —
But, in sudden amazement the holy man stands!

For, before the castle, a trumpet's blast
Rings so loud that the Palmer starts aghast;
And, at Gertrude's side, he sinks dismayed, —
Is't with dread of the living, or fear of the dead?

The doors of the chapel were open thrown,
And the beams through the pictured windows shone
On the face of De Clifford, with fury flushed, —
And forth on the Palmer he wildly rushed! —

"False Hubert!" he cried; and his knightly sword
Was sheathed in the heart of the fiend-sold lord! —

With a scream of terror, Gertrude fell —
For she knew the pride of Sir Raymond well!

He flew to raise her — but 'twas in vain:
Her spirit its flight in fear had ta'en! —
And Sir Raymond kneels that his soul be shriven,
And the stain of this deed be by grace forgiven: —

But ere the Abbot his grace can dole,
De Clifford's truthful heart is breaking, —
And his soul, also, its flight is taking! —
Christ, speed it to a heavenly goal! —
Oh, pray for the peace of Sir Raymond's soul!

THE

BARON'S YULE FEAST.

A

Christmas Rhyme.

Canto IV.

What power can stay the burst of song
When throats with ale are mellow?
What wight with nieve so stout and strong
Dares lift it, jolly freres among,
And cry, "Knaves, cease to bellow?"

"'Twas doleful drear," — the gossips vowed, —
To hear the minstrel's piteous tale!
But, when the swineherd tuned his crowd,[14]
And the gosherd began to grumble loud,
The gossips smiled, and sipped their ale!

" A boon, bold Thorold!" boldly cried
The gosherd from Croyland fen;
" I crave to sing of the fen so wide,
" And of geese and goosish men!"

Loud loffe they all; and the baron, with glee,
Cried " begin, good Swithin! for men may see
" Thou look'st so like a knowing fowl,
" Of geese thou art skilled right well to troll!"

Stout Swithin sware the baron spake well, —
And his halting ditty began to tell:
The rhyme was lame, and dull the joke, —
But it tickled the ears of clownish folk.

The Gosherd's Song.

'Tis a tale of merry Lincolnshire
I've heard my grannam tell;
And I'll tell it to you, my masters, here,
An' it likes you all, full well.

A Gosherd on Croyland fen, one day,
Awoke, in haste, from slumber;
And on counting his geese, to his sad dismay,
He found there lacked one of the number.

O the Gosherd looked west, and he looked east,
And he looked before and behind him;
And his eye from north to south he cast
For the gander — but couldn't find him!

So the Gosherd he drave his geese to the cote,
And began, forthwith, to wander
Over the marshy wild remote,
In search of the old stray gander.

O the Gosherd he wandered till twilight gray
Was throwing its mists around him;
But the gander seemed farther and farther astray —
For the Gosherd had not yet found him.

So the Gosherd, foredeeming his search in vain,
Resolved no farther to wander;
But to Croyland he turned him, in dudgeon, again,
Sore fretting at heart for the gander.

Thus he footed the fens so dreary and dern,
While his brain, like the sky, was dark'ning;
And with dread to the scream o' the startled hern
And the bittern's boom he was heark'ning.

But when the Gosherd the church-yard reached, —
Forefearing the dead would be waking, —
Like a craven upon the sward he stretched,
And could travel no farther for quaking!

And there the Gosherd lay through the night,
Not daring to rise and go further:
For, in sooth, the Gosherd beheld a sight
That frighted him more than murther!

From the old church clock the midnight hour
In hollow tones was pealing,
When a slim white ghost to the church porch door
Seemed up the footpath stealing!

Stark staring upon the sward lay the clown,
And his heart went "pitter patter," —
Till the ghost in the clay-cold grave sunk down, —
When he felt in a twitter-twatter!

Soon — stretching aloft its long white arms —
From the grave the ghost was peeping! —
Cried the Gosherd, "Our Lady defend me from harms,
"And Saint Guthlacke [15] have me in his keeping!"

The white ghost hissed! — the Gosherd swooned!
In the morn, — on the truth 'tis no slander, —
Near the church porch door a new grave he found,
And, therein, the white ghost—his stray gander!

The Gosherd, scarce, his mirthful meed
Had won, ere Tibbald of Stow, —
With look as pert as the pouncing glede
When he eyeth the chick below, —
Scraped his crowd,
And clear and loud,
As the merle-cock shrill,
Or the bell from the hill,
Thus tuned his throat to his rough sire's praise —
His sire the swineherd of olden days: —

The Swineherd's Song.

I SING of a swineherd, in Lindsey, so bold,
Who tendeth his flock in the wide forest-fold:
He sheareth no wool from his snouted sheep:
He soweth no corn, and none he doth reap:
Yet the swineherd no lack of good living doth know:
Come jollily trowl
The brown round bowl,
Like the jovial swineherd of Stow!

He hedgeth no meadows to fatten his swine:
He renteth no joist for his snorting kine:
They rove through the forest, and browse on the mast, —
Yet, he lifteth his horn, and bloweth a blast,
And they come at his call, blow he high, blow he low! —
Come, jollily trowl
The brown round bowl,
And drink to the swineherd of Stow!

He shunneth the heat 'mong the fern-stalks green, —
Or dreameth of elves 'neath the forest treen:

He wrappeth him up when the oak leaves sere
And the ripe acorns fall, at the wane o' the year;
And he tippleth at Yule, by the log's cheery glow.—
Come, jollily trowl
The brown round bowl,
And pledge the bold swineherd of Stow!

The bishop he passeth the swineherd in scorn,—
Yet, to mass wends the swineherd at Candlemas morn;
And he offereth his horn, at our Lady's hymn,
With bright silver pennies filled up to the brim:—
Saith the bishop, "A very good fellow, I trow!"—
Come, jollily trowl
The brown round bowl,
And honour the swineherd of Stow!

And now the brave swineherd, in stone, ye may spy,
Holding his horn, on the Minster so high!—
But the swineherd he laugheth, and cracketh his joke,
With his pig-boys that vittle beneath the old oak,—

Saying, "Had I no pennies, they'd make me no show!" —
Come, jollily trowl
The brown round bowl,
And laugh with the swineherd of Stow![16]

So merrily the chorus rose, —
For every guest chimed in, —
That, had the dead been there to doze,
They had surely waked with the din! —
So the rustics said while their brains were mellow;
And all called the swineherd "a jolly good fellow!"

"Come, hearty Snell!" said the Baron good;
"What sayest thou more of the merry greenwood?"

"I remember no lay of the forest, now," —
Said Snell, with a glance at three maids in a row;
"Belike, I could whimper a love-lorn ditty, —
"If Tib, Doll, and Bell, would listen with pity!"

"Then chaunt us thy love-song!" cried Baron and guests;
And Snell, looking shrewd, obeyed their behests.

The Woodman's Love Song.

ALONG the meads a simple maid
One summer's day a musing strayed,
And, as the cowslips sweet she pressed,
This burthen to the breeze confessed —
I fear that I'm in love!

For, ever since so playfully
Young Robin trod this path with me,
I always feel more happy here
Than ever I have felt elsewhere: —
I fear that I'm in love!

And, ever since young Robin talked
So sweetly, while alone we walked,
Of truth, and faith, and constancy,
I've wished he always walked with me: —
I fear that I'm in love!

And, ever since that pleasing night
When, 'neath the lady moon's fair light,
He asked my hand, but asked in vain,
I've wished he'd walk, and ask again: —
I fear that I'm in love!

And yet, I greatly fear, alas!
That wish will ne'er be brought to pass! —
What else to fear I cannot tell: —
I hope that all will yet be well—
But, surely, I'm in love!

Coy was their look, but true their pleasure,
While the maidens listed the woodman's measure;
Nor shrunk they at laughter of herdsman or hind,
But mixed with the mirth, and still looked kind.

One maid there was who faintly smiled,
But never joined their laughter:
And why, by Yule-mirth unbeguiled,
Sits the Baron's beauteous daughter?
Why looks she downcast, yet so sweet,
And seeketh no eyes with mirth to greet?

"My darling Edith, — hast no song?"
Saith Thorold, tenderly;
"Our guests have tarried to hear thee, long,
'And looked with wistful eye!"

Soft words the peerless damosel
Breathes of imperfect skill:
"Sweet birds," smiles the Baron, "all know —
right well,
"Can sweetly sing an' they will."

And the stranger minstrel, on his knee,
Offers his harp, with courtesy
So rare and gentle, that the hall
Rings with applause which one and all
Render who share the festival.

De Thorold smiled; and the maiden took
The harp, with grace in act and look, —
But waked its echoes tremulously, —
Singing no noisy jubilee, —
But a chanson of sweetly stifled pain —
So sweet — when ended all were fain
To hear her chaunt it o'er again.

The Baron's Daughter's Song.

I own the gay lark is the blythest bird
That welcomes the purple dawn;
But a sweeter chorister far is heard
When the veil of eve is drawn:

When the last lone traveller homeward wends
O'er the moorland, drowsily;
And the pale bright moon her crescent bends,
And silvers the soft gray sky;

And in silence the wakeful starry crowd
Their vigil begin to keep;
And the hovering mists the flowerets shroud,
And their buds in dew-drops weep;

Oh, then the nightingale's warbling wild,
In the depth of the forest dark,
Is sweeter, by far, to Sorrow's child,
Than the song of the cheerful lark!

" 'Twas sweet, but somewhat sad," said some;
And the Baron sought his daughter's eye,—
But, now, there fell a shade of gloom
On the cheek of Edith;—and tearfully,
He thought she turned to shun his look.

He would have asked his darling's woe,—
But the harp, again, the minstrel took;
And with such prelude as awoke
Regretful thoughts of an ancient foe
In Thorold's soul,—the minstrel stranger—
In spite of fear, in spite of danger,—
In measures sweet and soft, but quaint,—
Responded thus to Edith's plaint:—

The Minstrel's Response.

WHAT meant that glancing of thine eye,
That softly hushed, yet struggling sigh?
Hast thou a thought of woe or weal,
Which, breathed, my bosom would not feel?
Why should'st thou, then, that thought conceal,
Or hide it from my mind, Love?

Did'st thou e'er breathe a sigh to me,
And I not breathe as deep to thee?
Or hast thou whispered in mine ear
A word of sorrow or of fear, —
Or have I seen thee shed a tear, —
And looked a thought unkind, Love?

Did e'er a gleam of Love's sweet ray
Across thy beaming countenance play, —
Or joy its seriousness beguile,
And o'er it cast a radiant smile, —
And mine with kindred joy, the while,
Not glow as bright as thine, Love?

Why would'st thou, then, that something seek
To hide within thy breast, — nor speak,
  Its load of doubt, of grief, or fear,
  Of joy, or sorrow, to mine ear, —
  Assured this heart would gladly bear
A burthen borne by thine, Love?

Sir Wilfrid sat in thoughtful mood,
  When the youthful minstrel's song was ended;
While Edith by her loved sire stood,
  And o'er his chair in sadness bended.
The guests were silent; — for the chaunt,
Where all, of late, were jubilant,
Had kindled quick imagining
Who he might be that thus dared sing —
Breathing of deep and fervent feeling —
His tender passion half-revealing.

Soon, sportive sounds the silence broke:
    Saint Leonard's lay-brother,
    Who seldom could smother
Conception of mischief, or thought of a joke,
Drew forth his old rebeck from under his cloak, —

And touching the chords
To brain-sick words,—
While he mimicked a lover's phantasy,
Upward rolling his lustrous eye,—
With warblings wild
He flourished and trilled,—
Till mother and maiden aloud 'gan to laugh,
And clown challenged clown more good liquor to quaff.

These freakish rhymes, in freakish measure,
He chaunted, for his wayward pleasure.

The Lay-Brother's Love Song.

THE lilies are fair, down by the green grove,
Where the brooklet glides through the dell;
But I view not a lily so fair, while I rove,
As the maid whose name I could tell.

The roses are sweet that blush in the vale,
Where the thorn-bush grows by the well;
But they breathe not a perfume so sweet on the gale
As the maid whose name I could tell.

The lark singeth sweetly up in the sky, —
Over song-birds bearing the bell;
But one bird may for music the skylark defy, —
'Tis the maid whose name I could tell.

The angels all brightly glitter and glow,
In the regions high where they dwell;
But they beam not so bright as one angel below, —
'Tis the maid whose name I could tell.

Sport may, a while, defy heart-cares,
And woo faint smiles from pain;
Jesting, a while, may keep down tears—
But they will rise, again!

And saddening thoughts of others' care,
Unwelcome, though they be, to share, —
And though self-love would coldly say
"Let me laugh on, while others bear
"Their own grief-fardels as they may!" —
Yet, while in sadness droops a brother,
No brother-heart can sadness smother:

The tear of fellowship will start—
The tongue seek comfort to impart.

And English hearts, of old, were dull
To quell their yearnings pitiful:—
The guests forgot the jester's strain,
To think upon the harp again,
And of the youth who, to its swell,
So late, his sighs did syllable.

Natheless, no guest was skilled to find,
At once, fit words that might proclaim,—
For one who seemed without a name,—
Their sympathy;—and so, with kind
Intent, they urged some roundelay
The stranger minstrel would essay.

He struck the harp, forthwith, but sung
Of passion still,—and still it clung
To Love—his full, melodious tongue!

The Minstrel's Avowal.

O YES! I hold thee in my heart;
Nor shall thy cherished form depart
From its loved home: though sad I be,—
My heart, my Love, still cleaves to thee!

My dawn of life is dimmed and dark;
Hope's flame is dwindled to a spark;
But, though I live thus dyingly,—
My heart, my Love, still cleaves to thee!

Though short my summer's day hath been,
And now the winter's eve is keen,—
Yet, while the storm descends on me,—
My heart, my Love, still cleaves to thee!

No look of love upon me beams,—
No tear of pity for me streams:—
A thing forlorn—despairingly—
My heart, my Love, still cleaves to thee!

Thine eye would pity wert thou free
To soothe my woe; and though I be
Condemned to helpless misery,
My heart, my Love, still cleaves to thee!

The maidens wept—the clowns looked glum—
Each rustic reveller was dumb:
Sir Wilfrid struggled hard to hide
Revengeful throes and ireful pride,
That, now, his wounded bosom swelled,—
For in that youth he had beheld
An image which had overcast
His life with sorrow in the Past:—
He struggled,—and besought the youth
To leave his strains of woe and ruth
For some light lay, or merry rhyme,
More fitting Yule's rejoicing time.—
And, though it cost him dear, the while,
He eyed the minstrel with a smile.

The stranger waited not to note
The Baron's speech: like one distraught

He struck the harp—a wild farewell
Thus breathing to its deepest swell:—

The Minstrel's Farewell.

Oh! smile not upon me—my heart is not smiling:
Too long it hath mourned, 'neath reproach and reviling:
Thy smile is a false one: it never can bless me:
It doth not relieve,—but more deeply distress me!

I care not for beauty; I care not for riches:
I am not the slave whom their tinsel bewitches:
A bosom I seek
That is true, like mine own,—
Though pale be the cheek,
And its roses all flown,—
And the wearer be desolate, wretched, forlorn,—
And alike from each soul-soothing solace be torn.

That heart I would choose, which is stricken and slighted;
Whose joys are all fled, and whose hopes are all blighted;

For that heart alone
Would in sympathy thrill
With one like my own
That sorrow doth fill;—
With a heart whose fond breathings have ever been spurned,—
And hath long their rejection in solitude mourned.

The harp of my heart is unstrung; and to gladness
Respond not its chords—but to sorrow and sadness:—
Then speak not of mirth which my soul hath forsaken!
Why would ye my heart-breaking sorrows awaken?

It is the shriek of deathful danger!
None heed the heart-plaint of the stranger!
All start aghast, with deadly fear,
While they, again, that wild shriek hear!

"He drowns—Sir Wilfrid!" cries a hind:
"The ferryman is weak:

" He cannot stem the stream and wind:
" Help, help! for Jesu's sake!"

" Help one,—help all!" the Baron cries;
" Whatever boon he craves,
" I swear, by Christ, that man shall win,
" My ferryman who saves!"—

Out rush the guests: but one was forth
Who heard no word of boon:
His manly heart to deeds of worth
Needed no clarion.

He dashed into the surging Trent—
Nor feared the hurricane;
And, ere the breath of life was spent,
He seized the drowning man.—

" What is thy boon?" said Torksey's lord,—
But his cheek was deadly pale;
" Tell forth thy heart,—and to keep his word
" De Thorold will not fail."—

" I rushed to save my brother-man,
" And not to win thy boon:
" My just desert had been Heaven's ban —
" If thus I had not done!" —

Thus spake the minstrel, when the hall
The Baron's guests had gained:
And, now, De Thorold's noble soul
Spoke out, all unrestrained.

" Then for thy own heart's nobleness
" Tell forth thy boon," he said;
" Before thou tell'st thy thought, I guess
" What wish doth it pervade." —

" Sweet Edith, his true, plighted love,
" Romara asks of thee!
" What though my kindred with thee strove,
" And wrought thee misery?

" Our Lord, for whom we keep this day,
" When nailed upon the tree;
" Did he foredoom his foes, or pray
" That they might pardoned be?" —

" Son of my ancient foe!" replied
The Baron to the youth, —
" I glad me that my ireful pride
" Already bows to truth:

" Deep zeal to save our brother-man —
" Generous self-sacrifice
" For other's weal — is nobler than
" All blood-stained victories!

" Take thy fair boon! — for thou hast spoiled
" Death, — greedy Death — of prey —
" This poor man who for me hath toiled
" Full many a stormy day!

" I feel — to quell the heart's bad flame,
" And bless an enemy,
" Is richer than all earthly fame —
" Though the world should be its fee!

" My sire was by thy kinsman slain; —
" Yet, as thy tale hath told,
" Thy kinsman's usurping act was vain —
" He died in the dungeon cold.

" Perish the memory of feud,
" And deeds of savage strife!
" Blood still hath led to deeds of blood,
" And life hath paid for life!

" My darling Edith shall be thine —
" My blood with thine shall blend —
" The Saxon with the Norman line —
" In love our feuds shall end.

" In age I'll watch ye bless the poor,
" And smile upon your love;
" And, when my pilgrimage is o'er,
" I hope to meet above

" Him who on earth a Babe was born
" In lowliness, as on this morn, —
" And tabernacled here below,
" Lessons of brotherhood to show!"

High was the feast, and rich the song,
For many a day, that did prolong
The wedding-revelry:

But more it needeth not to sing
Of our fathers' festive revelling:—
How will the dream agree
With waking hours of famished throngs,
Brooding on daily deepening wrongs—
A stern reality!—

With pictures, that exist in life,
Of thousands waging direful strife
With gaunt Starvation, in the holds
Where Mammon vauntingly unfolds
His boasted banner of success?

Oh, that bruised hearts, in their distress,
May meet with hearts whose bounteousness
Helps them to keep their courage up,—
"Bating no jot of heart or hope!"[17]

My suffering brothers! still your hope
Hold fast, though hunger make ye droop!
Right—glorious Right—shall yet be done!
The Toilers' boon shall yet be won!
Wrong from its fastness shall be hurled—
The World shall be a happy world!—
It shall be filled with brother-men,—
And merry Yule oft come again!

NOTES.

NOTES.

I.

Torksey's Hall.

The remains of this ancient erection (of which a representation is given in the accompanying vignette) form an interesting antiquarian object beside the Trent, twelve miles from Lincoln, and seven from Gainsborough. The entire absence of any authentic record, as to the date of the foundation, or its former possessors, leaves the imagination at full liberty to clothe it with poetic legend. Visits made to it, in my childhood, and the hearing of wild narratives respecting the treasures buried beneath its ruins, and the power of its lords in the times of chivalry, fixed it, very early, in my mind, as the fit site for a tale of romance. In addition to the beautiful fragment of a front on the Trent bank, massive and extensive foundations in the back-ground show that it must have been an important building in by-gone times.

Torksey was, undoubtedly, one of the first towns in Lincolnshire, in the Saxon period. Only three of the towns in the county are classed in Domesday Book, and it is one of them: "Lincoln mans. 982; Stamford 317: *Terchesey* 102." (Turner's Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons, 1836, vol. iii. page 251.) Writers of parts of the county history, — (for a complete

history of Lincolnshire has not yet been written,) — affirm that Torksey is the *Tiovulfingacester* of Venerable Bede; but Smith, the learned editor of the Cambridge edition of Bede, inclines to the opinion that Southwell is the town indicated by the pious and industrious monastic. The passage in Bede leaves every thing to conjecture: he simply relates that a truth-speaking presbyter and abbot of *Pearteneu*, (most likely, Partney, near Horncastle, in Lincolnshire,) named Deda, said that an old man had told him, that he, with a great multitude, was baptized by Paulinus, in the presence of King Edwin, "in fluvio Treenta juxta civitatem quæ lingua Anglorum Tiovulfingacaestir vocatur" — in the river Trent, near the city which in the language of the Angles is called Tiovulfingacaestir (Smith's Bede: Cambr. 1722, page 97.) — This passage occurs immediately after the relation of the Christian mission of Paulinus into Lindsey, and his conversion of Blecca, governor of Lincoln, and his family, while the good King Edwin reigned over East Anglia, to which petty kingdom Lincolnshire seems sometimes to have belonged, though it was generally comprehended in the kingdom of Mercia, during the period of the Heptarchy.

If Stukeley be correct in his supposition that the "Foss-dyke," or canal which connects the Trent here with the Witham at Lincoln, be the work of the Romans, — and I know no reason for doubting it, — Torksey, standing at the junction of the artificial river with the Trent, must have been an important station even before the Saxon times. These are Stukeley's words relative to the commercial use of the Foss-Dyke: "By this means the corn of Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire, Rutland, and Lincolnshire, came in; — from the Trent, that of Nottinghamshire; all easily

conveyed northward to the utmost limits of the Roman power there, by the river Ouse, which is navigable to the imperial city of York. This city (York) was built and placed there, in that spot, on the very account of the corn-boats coming thither, and the emperors there resided, on that account; and the great morass on the river Foss was the haven, or bason, where these corn-boats unladed. The very name of the Foss at York, and Foss-dyke between Lincoln and the Trent, are memorials of its being an artificial work, even as the great Foss road, equally the work of the spade, though in a different manner." (Stukeley's Palæographia Britannica: Stamford, 1746: No. 2. page 39.)

In the superb edition of Dugdale's Monasticon Anglicanum, edited by Sir Henry Ellis and others (1825), occurs the following note, also evidencing the extent of ancient Torksey: — "Mr. T. Sympson, who collected for a history of Lincoln, in a letter preserved in one of Cole's manuscript volumes in the British Museum, dated January 20, 1741, says, 'Yesterday, in Atwater's Memorandums, I met with a composition between the prior of St. Leonard's in Torksey and the nuns of the Fosse, by which it appears there were then three parishes in Torksey: viz. All Saints, St. Mary's, and St Peter's." (Vol. iv. page 292.)

At what date this "composition" took place between the prior and nuns, we are not told: of course, it must have been before the dissolution of the religious houses. Leland's account of Torksey, which is as follows, applies to a period immediately succeeding that event.

"The olde buildinges of Torkesey wer on the south of the new toune, [that is, at the junction of the Trent with the Fosse] but ther now is litle seene of olde buildinges, more than

a chapelle, wher men say was the paroch chirch of olde Torkesey; and on Trent side the Yerth so balkith up that it shewith that there be likelihod hath beene sum waulle, and by it is a hill of yerth cast up: they caulle it the Wynde Mille Hille, but I thinke the dungeon of sum olde castelle was there. By olde Torkesey standith southely the ruines of Fosse Nunnery, hard by the stone-bridge over Fosse Dik; and there Fosse Dike hath his entering ynto Trente. There be 2 smaul paroche chirches in new Torkesey and the Priory of S. Leonard standith on theste [the East] side of it. The ripe [bank] that Torkesey standith on is sumwhat higher ground than is by the west ripe of Trent. Trent there devidith, and a good deale upward, Lincolnshire from Nottinghamshire." (Itinerary: Oxon, 1745: vol. i. page 33.)

II.

Thorold.

The high character for generousness and hospitality assigned to this most ancient of Lincolnshire families, by history and tradition, was my only reason for giving its name to an imaginary lord of Torksey. Ingulphus, the Croyland chronicler, in a passage full of grateful eloquence, — (commencing, "Tunc inter familiares nostri monasterii, et benevolos amicos, erat præcipuus consiliarius quidam. Vicecomes Lincolniæ, dictus Thoroldus," — but too long to quote entire,) — relates, that in a dreadful famine, which occurred in the reign of Edward the Confessor, Thorold, sheriff of Lincolnshire, gave his manor of Bokenhale to the abbey of Croyland, and afterwards

bestowed upon it his manor of Spalding, with all its rents and profits. (Gale's Rer. Ang. Script. Vet. Tom. i. page 65. Oxon, 1684.)

Tanner thus briefly notices the latter circumstance: "Spalding. Thorold de Bukenale, brother to the charitable countess Godiva, gave a place here, A. D. 1052, for the habitation, and lands for the maintenance of a prior and five monks from Croiland." (Notitia, page 251. fol. 1744.) The generosity of the female Thorold, Godiva, is matter of notoriety in the traditionary history of Coventry; and her name, and that of her husband, are found in connection with the history of the very ancient town of Stow, in Lincolnshire, as benefactors to its church. "Leofricus, comes Merciæ, et Godiva ejus uxor ecclesiam de S. Marie Stow, quam Eadnotus, episcopus Lincolniæ, construxit, pluribus ornamentis ditavit" — Leofric, earl of Mercia, and Godiva his wife, enriched with many adornments the church of St. Mary at Stow, which Eadnoth, bishop of Lincoln, built. (Leland's Collectanea, vol. i. page 158. London, 1770.)

In Kimber and Johnson's Baronetage (vol. i. page 470.) the Thorold of the reign of Edward the Confessor is said to be descended from Thorold, sheriff of Lincolnshire in the reign of Kenelph, king of Mercia. Betham, in his "Baronetage of England" (Ipswich, 1801, vol. i. page 476) says the pedigree of the Thorolds is a "very fine" one, and enumerates its several branches of Marston, Blankney, Harmston, Morton, and Claythorp, and of the "High Hall and Low Hall, in Hough, all within the said county of Lincoln." Betham, and other writers of his class, enumerate Thorolds, sheriffs of Lincolnshire, in the reigns of Philip and Mary, Elizabeth, James I. and Charles I.; and Sir George Thorold of Harm-

ston was sheriff of London and Middlesex, in 1710, — and afterwards Lord Mayor.

Sir John Thorold of Syston is now the chief representative of this Saxon family; but report says that he delights to live abroad — rather than in the midst of his tenantry and dependants, to gladden the hearts of the poor, and receive happiness from diffusing it among others, after the good example of his ancestors.

III.

Fosse Nunnery.

"The Nunnery of the Fosse was begun by the inhabitants of Torksey upon some demesne lands belonging to the Crown, pretty early in King John's time; but King Henry III. confirming it, is said to have been the founder. The circumstance of the foundation by the men of Torksey is mentioned in King Henry's charter. The Inspeximus of the 5th Edw. II., which contains it, also contains a charter of King John, granting to the nuns two marks of silver which they had been used to pay annually into the Exchequer for the land at Torksey. In this charter King John calls them the Nuns of Torkesey." — *Dugdale's Monasticon*, vol. iv. p. 292.

IV.

Saint Leonard's.

Bishop Tanner, following Speed and Leland, says, "Torkesey. On the east side of the new town stood a priory of Black Canons, built by K. John to the honour of St. Leonard."

— *Notitia*, p. 278. This priory was granted to Sir Philip Hobby, after the Dissolution: the Fosse Nunnery to Edward Lord Clinton.

V.

Thorney Wood.

In the neighbourhood of Torksey, and, traditionally, part of an extensive forest, in past times. A branch of the Nevils, claiming descent from the great earls of Warwick and Montagu, reside at Thorney.

VI.

Grunsel.

This old word for *threshold* is still common in Lincolnshire; and with Milton's meaning so plainly before his understanding (*Paradise Lost*, book i. line 460.), it is strange that Dr. Johnson should have given "the lower part of the building" as an explanation for *grunsel*. Lemon, in his "Etymology," spells the word "ground-sill," and then derives the last syllable from "soil." Nothing can be more stupid. Door-sill is as common as grunsel, for threshold, in Staffordshire, as well as Lincolnshire; and, in both counties, "window-sill" is frequent. I remember, too, in my boyhood, having heard the part of the plough to which the share is fitted — the frame of the harrows — and the frame of a grindstone, each called "sill" by the farmers of Lindsey.

VII.

Romara.

In this instance I have also used a name associated with the ancient history of Lincolnshire as an imaginary Norman lord of Torksey. "William de Romara, lord of Bolingbroke, in Lincolnshire, was the first earl of that county after the Conquest. He was the son of Roger, son of Gerold de Romara; which Roger married Lucia, daughter of Algar, earl of Chester, and sister and heir to Morcar, the Saxon earl of Northumberland and Lincoln. In 1142 he founded the Abbey of Revesby, in com. Linc., bearing then the title of Earl of Lincoln." — Bankes' *Extinct and Dormant Peerage.*

VIII.

The Trent.

"Or Trent, who like some earth-born giant spreads
His thirty arms along the indented meads."

Milton.

IX.

The Heygre.

The tide, at the equinoxes especially, presents a magnificent spectacle on the Trent. It comes up even to Gainsborough, which is seventy miles from the sea, in one overwhelming wave, spreading across the wide river-channel, and frequently putting the sailors into some alarm for the safety of their vessels, which are dashed to and fro, while "all hands" are

engaged in holding the cables and slackening them, so as to relieve the ships.

To be in a boat, under the guardianship of a sailor, and to hear the shouts on every hand of "'Ware Heygre!"—as the grand wave is beheld coming on,—and then to be tossed up and down in the boat, as the wave is met,—form no slight excitements for a boy living by the side of Trent.

I find no key to the derivation of the word Heygre in the Etymologists. The Keltic verb, Éigh, signifying, to cry, shout, sound, proclaim; or the noun Eigin, signifying difficulty, distress, force, violence—may, perhaps, be the root from whence came this name for the tide—so dissimilar to any other English word of kindred meaning. It is scarcely probable that the word by which the earliest inhabitants of Britain would express their surprise at this striking phenomenon should ever be lost, or changed for another.

X.

The Porpoise.

The appearance of a porpoise, at the season when his favourite prey, the salmon, comes up the river to spawn, is another high excitement to dwellers on the Trent. I remember well the almost appalling interest with which, in childhood, I beheld some huge specimen of this marine visitor, drawn up by crane on a wharf, after an enthusiastic contest for his capture by the eager sailors.

XI.

Agnes Plantagenet.

The very interesting relic of the Old Hall at Gainsborough is associated, in the mind of one who spent more than half his existence in the old town, with much that is chivalrous. Mowbrays, Percys, De Burghs, and other high names of the feudal era are in the list of its possessors, as lords of the manor. None, however, of its former tenants calls up such stirring associations as 'Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster,' who, with his earldom of Lincoln, held this castle and enlarged and beautified it. Tradition confidently affirms that his daughter was starved to death by him, in one of the rooms of the old tower,—in consequence of her perverse attachment to her father's foe,—the knight of Torksey. Often have I heard the recital, from some aged gossip, by the fireside on a winter's night; and the rehearsal was invariably delivered with so much of solemn and serious averment—that the lady was still seen,—that she would point out treasure, to any one who had the courage to speak to her,—and that some families *had been* enriched by her ghostly means, though they had kept the secret,—as to awaken within me no little dread of leaving the fireside for bed in the dark!

With indescribable feeling I wandered along the carven galleries and ruined rooms, or crept up the antique massive staircases, of this crumbling mansion of departed state, in my boyhood,—deriving from these stolen visits to its interior, mingled with my admiring gaze at its battlemented turret, and rich octagonal window, (which tradition said had lighted the chapel erected by John of Gaunt,) a passion for chivalry

and romance, that not even my Chartism can quench. Once, and once only, I remember creeping, under the guidance of an elder boy, up to the 'dark room' in the turret; but the fear that we should really see the ghostly Lady caused us to run down the staircase, with beating hearts, as soon as we had reached the door and had had one momentary peep!

Other traditions of high interest are connected with this ancient mansion. One, says that Sweyn the Danish invader, (the remains of whose camp exist at the distance of a mile from the town,) was killed at a banquet, by his drunken nobles, in the field adjoining its precincts. Another, avers that in the Saxon building believed to have stood on the same spot, as the residence of the earls of Mercia, the glorious Alfred's wedding-feast was held. Speed gives some little aid to the imagination in its credent regard for the story: "Elswith, the wife of king Ælfred, was the daughter of Ethelfred, surnamed Muchel, that is, the Great, an Earle of the Mercians, who inhabited about Gainesborough, in Lincolnshire: her mother was Edburg, a lady borne of the Bloud roiall of Mercia." (Historie of Great Britaine, 1632: page 333.)

XII.

Roche.

A visit to the beautiful ruins of Roche Abbey, near ancient Tickhill, and to the scenery amidst which they lie, created a youthful desire to depict them in verse. This doggrel ditty (I forestall the critics!) of the Miller of Roche is all, however, that I preserved of the imperfect piece. The ditty is a homely versification of a homely tale which was often told

by the fireside in Lincolnshire. I never saw anything resembling it in print, until Mr. Dickens (whose kind attention I cannot help acknowledging) pointed out to me a similar story in the Decameron.

Roche Abbey, according to the "Monasticon Anglicanum," was founded by Richard de Builli and Richard Fitz-Turgis, in 1147. "The architecture bespeaks the time of Edward II. or III." (Edit. 1825: vol. v. p. 502.)

XIII.

Scrogg and Carr.

Johnson says, "Scrog. A stunted shrub, bush, or branch; yet used in some parts of the north." In Lincolnshire, however, the word is used to designate wild ground on which "stunted shrub, bush, or branch" grows, and *not* as a synonyme with shrub or bush.

Carr I have looked for in vain among the etymologists. Johnson merely quotes Gibson's Camden to show that, in the names of places, *Car* "seems to have relation to the British *caer*, a city;" and Junius, Skinner, Lemon, Horne Tooke, Jamieson, &c. are silent about it. The word is applied, in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, to the low lands, or wide marsh pastures that border the Trent; and I feel little doubt that, like the word *heygre*, and many others that might be collected, it has been in use ever since it was given to these localities, by the primeval tribes, the Kelts, when they first saw these beautiful tracts, so much subject to inundation, like the flat borders of their own rivers in the East. כַּר (car) a pasture, is found in Isaiah, xxx. 23. Psalm lxv.

14, &c., and although כִּכָּר (kicar) is simply translated "plain" in the established version, and Gesenius would, still more vaguely, render it "circuit, surrounding country," (from כור, in Arabic, *to be round*,) yet I suspect the words come from the same root, and have the same meaning. Thus, Genesis xiii. 10.

וַיִּשָּׂא־לוֹט אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־כָּל־כִּכַּר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כֻלָּהּ מַשְׁקֶה
לִפְנֵי־שַׁחֵת יְהוָה אֶת־סְדֹם וְאֶת־עֲמֹרָה כְּגַן־יְהוָה כְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
בְּאֲכָה צֹעַר׃ might literally be rendered "And Lot raised his eyes, and saw all the carr of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before Jehovah destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah: like the garden of Jehovah; like the land of Mitzraim, as thou approachest Zoar." How natural, that the Keltic or Kymric tribes should behold, in the Trent pastures, the resemblance of the plains on the banks of the Jordan, the Nile, the Tigris, and Euphrates — (for the term גַּן־יְהוָה *garden of Jehovah* most probably denotes Mesopotamia, in the very ancient fragments collected by Moses to form the book of Genesis) — and should denote them by the same name! خوار, khawār, also signifies "low or sloping ground," in Richardson's Arabic and Persian Dictionary; and "Carr, a bog, a fen, or morass," occurs in Armstrong's Gaelic Dictionary. The word I conceive is thus clearly traced to its Keltic or Eastern origin.

XIV.

Crowd.

Sir John Hawkins, in his highly curious "History of Music" (vol. ii. page 274) says "The *Cruth* or *Crowth*" was

an instrument "formerly in common use in the principality of Wales," and is the "prototype of the whole fidicinal species of musical instruments." "It has six strings, supported by a bridge, and is played on by a bow." "The word *Cruth* is pronounced in English *Crowth*, and corruptly *Crowd*." "Crwth is the Saxon appellation given by Leland, for the instrument (Collectanea: vol. v.)" "A player on the *cruth* was called a Crowther or Crowder, and so also is a common fiddler to this day; and hence, undoubtedly, Crowther, or Crowder, a common surname. Butler, with his usual humour, has characterised a common fiddler, and given him the name of Crowdero."

"I'th' head of all this warlike rabble
"Crowdero marched, expert and able."

XV.

Rebeck.

Rebeck is a word well known from Milton's exquisite "L'Allegro." Sir John Hawkins (vol. ii. page 86) traces it to the Moorish *Rebeb*; and believes he finds this old three-stringed fiddle in the hands of Chaucer's Absolon, the parish-clerk, who could "plaie songs on a smale ribible."

XV.

St. Guthlacke.

The patron saint of the ancient Abbey of Croyland.

XVI.

The Swineherd of Stow.

St. Remigius, the Norman bishop, is placed on the pinnacle of one buttress that terminates the splendid façade, or west front of Lincoln Cathedral, and the Swineherd of Stow, with his horn in his hand, on the other. The tradition is in the mouth of every Lincolner, that this effigied honour was conferred on the generous rudester because he gave his horn filled with silver pennies towards the rebuilding or beautifying of the Minster.

XVII.

"Nor bate a jot of heart or hope."

Milton's Sonnet on his blindness.

THE END.

By the same Author.

THE

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"The poem is written in the Spenserian stanza. Grander and more nervous than 'Childe Harold,' which in its reflective passages it somewhat resembles — evidencing much deeper reading, much profounder thought, much greater power of the forcible and the terrible in expression, though with less beauty of poetic imagery — this Prison Rhyme comes nearer than any other poem in our language to the grand work of Milton. The spirit of that mighty master, which hitherto has looked so coldly and contemptuously on all its worshippers, has found out this imprisoned Chartist, and breathed upon him in his cell. Wonder of wonders, this self-taught shoemaker is hardly less versed in curious and mystic lore than the sightless bard, to whose mental vision all antiquity, and its fables, its heroes, and its creeds, seemed revealed. . . . . .

"With wonderful pomp and luxuriance of language does the author recall the great names of antiquity, and invest the form of each with peculiar and distinctive characteristics. The stanza, so difficult of management in an inferior hand, is by him wrought, even in the most elaborate and difficult descriptions, with as much ease as a skilled hand weaves osier rods into basket-work. He is master of his verse, and uses it as a master, not a servant. He makes it subservient to his thought; with a boldness more to be admired than condemned, he employs rhymes and words unauthorised by authority rather than suffer his muse to be fettered by commonplace rules. . . . . .

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art, a more subtile and profound appreciation of the beautiful, truer knowledge of truth, a higher, wider, more healthful sympathy with man, including the multifarious and progressive life of the past, with this *our* little, evanishing world of to-day, and that great and sublime future which all the truer and more fervent spirits of the time delight to herald and to hasten. But, if we compare Mr. Cooper's poem with the ordinary offspring of the modern muse, — the verses, not of millennium-singers and world-betterers, but of gentlemen rhymesters, writers of love-lorn ditties and May-fair fancies, — if, even, we compare it with nine-tenths of the fancy verse dedicated to Nature, wherein her everlasting hills and skies, fairy-haunted dells, and love-murmuring brooks make an eternal jingle, we shall find that we are on higher ground, and breathe a purer air. We shall find ourselves transported, by the wand of no mean magician, from the realms of hackneyed sentiment to the wonder-land of mighty spirits, sages, and heroes, giant shadows, voices of the past, whose awful tones swell up, through the roar of congregated ages, melancholy oracles, sublime warnings, preaching the undying majesty of Truth and Reason, and the ever-glorious virtues of Justice, Knowledge, and Freedom. Such a singer as this is at least worth listening to, if it were only to make us forget for a while that we live in the golden age of mediocrity and money-worship. Listened to not the less, nor the more, because the singer is a Chartist, and a working, self-educated man. Listened to, not simply because, having been tried for conspiracy, and having suffered imprisonment for it, the writer comes out from his dungeon with this book in his hand, saying, ' Thus much, and something more, I have done even in a prison.' These are not the grounds upon which we recommend a perusal of this poem ; though, undoubtedly, such considerations *do* add much interest, of a personal kind, to its publication. We recommend it, because it embraces a lofty subject, because its execution evidences considerable knowledge, and great daring and sustained power of thought ; because it seems to us a natural prelude to something else from the same source, still more elevated in purpose and conception, and much more complete in artistic execution. In fact, judging from this as a first effort of his muse, we are inclined to hail the writer as a new power in the world of poetry, the ruler of a new domain, as yet but little known ; but, which the public cannot fail to recognise, when its kings of thought shall put on their singing robes, and, with fresh voice and soul, speak its praises to the world." — *Sentinel*, Oct. 12. 1845.

" The book possesses mind — mind which makes itself felt and understood, and which therefore demands respect. . . . The author's case claims for his poem the recognition of an historical monument, which, if its merits were but a tithe part of what they are, we should feel ourselves precluded from dismissing with a brief notice," — *Athenæum*, Sept. 6. 1845.

" Noteworthy, — independently of all outward circumstances ; for the the poem is well-conceived, wrought out with no ordinary amount of power, clearly and concisely expressed, and not altogether wanting in imagination." — *Illuminated Magazine*, Oct. 1. 1845.

" We have now before us one of the most extraordinary literary productions of the present day — we may say of the present age — a work which, if we do not greatly err, will gain for its author a reputation as

lasting, if not as great, as that of Byron, Spenser, and Milton, a mingling of whose finest characteristics is to be found in these 963 Spenserian stanzas. In estimating truly the greatness of this poem, we must consider the circumstances under which it was written. The author is a self-educatad man, one of the humbler classes, who has had to struggle and toil for his daily bread, and at times very hardly too, as we have good reason to know; his own indomitable energy and overmastering genius has alone sufficed to conquer every obstacle which impeded his progress in intellectual growth; the serpents which twined and wreathed their voluminous folds around his truly herculean mind, he has destroyed, and now stands forth in this, the manifestation of his inner man, like the Sampson of his wondrous dreams. * * * * *

A form majestic, yet terrible, is that in which the spirit of this lately imprisoned Chartist now exhibits itself to the public gaze: truly a star has arisen in the poetical horizon, and if the light which it now sheds be somewhat baleful, let us consider that the fogs of neglect and persecution, and the noisome dungeon vapours, yet hang about it, and obscure its brightness. * * * * * * * *

We have been by turns delighted and amazed at the vision, or series of visions, here presented to us; at the richness, the originality, the grandeur, and, at times, the loveliness of the conceptions, expressed in language the most nervous and energetic, flowing on and on in such a full tide of majestic rhythm; the extensive acquaintance with ancient and modern history, with the laws which regulate mind and matter, with the facts and terms and hypotheses of science; in short, the knowledge so universal as to seem intuitive and not acquired, reminding us most strongly of Dante and Milton, the former of whom we are assured our author has never read, although a recent reviewer of this poem founded his observations throughout on the supposition that it is a direct imitation of the *Inferno*, and the latter of whom is Cooper's acknowledged master of the lyre. How the sightless bard would rejoice in a pupil who could apostrophise him thus:

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We will venture to say that more noble stanzas than these were never addressed to one enthroned amid the deathless sons of song by a human worshipper. More passionate thoughts, and enthusiastic aspirations after liberty, were never breathed." — *Kentish Independent*, Oct. 11. 1845.

"This is a poem of no ordinary character; the production of a man terribly in earnest, who speaks out his thoughts without reserve or fear, and who appears to possess one of those vigorous, untameable spirits, whose influence, for evil or for good, is in every age so commanding.

* * * * * *

The natural poetry which lived in this man's soul appears to have made him a democrat in principle: indeed, in the true sense of the term, the poet is ever a democrat, for he deals with the universal, the eternal, and not with the conventional, local, or transient: you could not, try ever so hard, or long, make the true poet a decent and devout conformist to the things which are; the poet and the prophet are, in most instances, very nearly related to each other, and hence the man who sings the praises of the lovely and the true, is well-nigh certain to wage war with the repulsive and the false. * * * * * *

He tells us, in the preface to his poem, that he bent over the last, and wielded the awl, till three-and-twenty, that amid want and bodily weakness he searched for truth, and that his education has been the work of himself during hours of leisure. Well, all this proves the vigour of his aspiration after intellectual culture, and the native power of the faculties which he sought to cultivate, whilst it serves to account for the force and beauty which mark to so large an extent the poem before us. It is not necessary to read many stanzas to discover that the spirit, with whose thoughts and feelings you are becoming familiar, is of no commonplace stamp, and is destined to fulfil a mission such as is not allotted to men in general. He is no mental pigmy who studies languages whilst pining for food, or tortured by disease, and who produces, during his two years and eleven weeks' imprisonment, a poem in ten books—part of an historical romance—a series of tales, and an Hebrew guide. In all this a mental power speaks out, which demands notice and appreciation; and however little many persons may sympathise with the man's aims and opinions, yet surely all must commend his diligence, admire his vigour, and confess that though wrong on some points, he is still a genius, whom to pass by with contempt is impossible, for he wields a power which must be felt, and will be responded to by masses, to whom this same Thomas Cooper will appear as a kind of prophet, calling them to thought, to energy, and hope. * * * * * * * * *

It must not be imagined, however, that the spirit of mere *antagonism* is the only spirit which pervades this poem—the true poet's love of nature and of man is visible—touches of a tenderness most exquisite are scattered through the whole: this stern, hard man, who dares to call things by their right names—who looks tyranny in the face, and denounces it as a curse, be the consequences what they may, yes, this man of fire, is loving as a little child, when he treads the sacred grounds of domestic feelings and relationships. If his invective be bitter, his blessings are deep—

"The hate of hate—the scorn of scorn—the love of love,"

may be truly stated as his dower: his every feeling is in an extreme,—intensity, passion, is his great characteristic; and this will constitute the main source of his influence, and, unless we are much mistaken, will render "The Purgatory of Suicides" as popular in the political, as "Pollok's Course of Time" in the religious world. We regard this poem as a pledge of higher and more matured efforts in the future. Cooper's entire man is not developed yet—his mind is but half expanded: many a crude idea will yet grow into definiteness and proportion, many a one-sided estimate will be adjusted by advanced wisdom, and the poet himself rise to a yet more commanding elevation. There are defects in the construction of this poem—as to language, versification, and imagery—which, as critics, we should point out, were our space less limited: there are also passages of power and beauty, which we would fain quote, but we recommend our readers to procure it, and give it a calm and candid perusal. In the most friendly spirit do we throw out these thoughts. We have no desire to be captious and hypercritical. We hail the pub-

lication of this poem as another proof of the intellectual improvement of the working classes. We join with the author in longing for the day when enlightment, virtue, peace, joy and freedom shall reign supreme; and, meantime, we wish him 'God speed.' — *Nottingham Review*. Oct. 17, 1845.

"We had thought that the spirit of high poetry was dead. We were in error — we rejoice that we were in error. The poem lying before us, is one of the noblest creations of modern times, deeply impregnated with power and beauty, and glowing in every page with the illuminings of searching and passionate thought. The exordium reminds us somewhat of the opening of the second book of Paradise Lost; and, extravagant though the assertion may be deemed, it is scarcely inferior to that fine portion of Milton's deathless epic. The conception of the groundwork is original and vast; and its machinery, though in some points heterogeneous, is indicative of a profound and daringly original mind. Where has the author been hidden until now? He wields an intellect of mighty power, and an imagination of massive and beautiful proportions, — combining in the range of both much of the sublimity of Milton, the spiritual metaphysics and golden imagery of Shelley, the wayward magnificence of Byron, with the solemn and deeply-toned power of our own Elliot. We shall halt not at asserting that in the catalogue of England's greatest bards must hereafter be inscribed the name of THOMAS COOPER." — *Sheffield Iris*, Nov. 6, 1845.

"One of those rare works which appear at but distant intervals of time. It proclaims the author to be gifted with the spirit of poetry in the highest degree. Whatever may be thought of, or however much we may be called upon to condemn some of his sentiments, it must be conceded that grandeur of imagination, depth of feeling, and majesty of expression are his predominant characteristics. Though confined in a dungeon, so well was the poet's head stored with intellectual treasure, that his mental resources appear boundless. The lore of ancient and modern (sacred and profane) history, the subtleties of the casuist, the polemics of the theologian, the deductions of the philosopher, and the dogmas of the politician, are all summoned at will by the author, and made the obedient ministers to his purpose. This remarkable concentration of knowledge, combined with the greatest daring of thought, and the most copious powers of language, are no less calculated to astonish, than the beauty and feeling of the verses are to enwrap and charm every reader who is capable of appreciating genuine poetry. It is impossible to read a work like this and fail to observe that the author has one of those gifted giant minds, capable of exercising much good or evil to his fellow-men, according to the direction it takes." — *Leicestershire Mercury*, December 13. 1845.

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"The scene of most of these stories is laid in Lincolnshire, and some of them relate to local events and characters. The Barber of Caistor, who, though a disciple of equality, felt his prejudices shocked because a gentleman was talking to a gipsy, — the Poacher of Lindsey, who at length learns that, however iniquitous the game-laws may be, it is folly to poach 'in a country where the rich all hang together on their own side of the wheatsack,' — the Tailor of Horncastle, who falls into difficulties because suspected of sedition, — the reforming Carrier of Ludforth, who 'brings his ninepence to nought,' through unseemly haste in improving his social condition, — the blind Fiddler of Torksey, the crony and Mentor of an old fisherman of the Trent, one sadly given to extravagant anticipations when a little excited with rum, and whom his bosom friend constantly reproves with the warning, 'Don't say so till you're sure!' . . . . . .

"They are manifest portraits, and admonish us of the author's skill in taking the literal likeness, which in his poem had no place. There, all was indistinct as the Hades it depicted, more so than the Ossianic misty land of ghosts; but here, in these tales and sketches, there are a simplicity

and decision of handling which make all plain and clear and lifelike. We are glad thus to meet the author in daylight, and to be able to state that he will bear looking at, needs no interpreter, and speaks genuine English. Mr. Cooper is not without humour in his delineations, and we would refer in proof to the tale of 'Master Zerubbabel, the Antiquary;' nor without pathos: witness his 'Beggared Gentleman's Address to his Crooked Stick,' and his 'History of Cockle Tom,' the hero-sailor, both good in their way.

"It is a mark-worthy fact, and one which has frequently struck us from the earliest breaking out of Chartism, namely, the respectability of its literature; and let the more sober-minded among the Chartists learn, that such social reforms as are desirable will be better served by such works as this before us, than by democratic harangues and insurrectionary outbreaks. The poetic genius which has been consecrated to this cause is of singular power; it is curious also that it should have been of the epic, not the lyrical kind."—*Athenæum*, Nov. 15, 1845.

"The contents of the book consist of a series of homely scenes and sketches of life,

'The short and simple annals of the poor,'

with but few exceptions; and they are certainly not altogether devoid of either entertainment or instruction. The author openly avows himself a Chartist; but, whatever his chartism may be as a political panacea, here, as a prevailing purpose in his 'Instances,' it has a merit that must recommend it to both the philanthropist and the patriot. There is nothing of the dogmatist in their author, whatever there may be of the democrat, as he here presents himself; but he is as diffident of his powers as he is devoted in his principles. . . . . .

"They were written, we further learn, with one or two exceptions, during the author's confinement for 'conspiracy' in Stafford gaol, merely as a relief from the intense thought exercised in the composition of his 'Prison Rhyme.' But, notwithstanding their origin, they have no taint of the atmosphere of a gaol about them, but rather savour of sentiment and feeling, which we certainly should look for anywhere but within the walls of a prison.

"We have read some of these stories with deep interest, and few, we are persuaded, will rise from their perusal but with feelings all the warmer for what they have read; for, certainly, many of their details are eminently calculated

'The conscious heart of charity to warm,
And its wide wish, benevolence, dilate.'

"They can scarcely fail to be popular with 'the masses;' and, upon the whole, we think they deserve to be so."—*Atlas*, Nov. 22, 1845.

"We are glad to meet with this writer again so soon. He is one of those men of strong mind and earnest heart, who are always worth listening to. It is easy to see that he is always sincere—that he belongs, body and soul, to the horn-handed sons of labour—that he despises theories which bear no practical fruit—and that (it is this which makes

us think so well of him) he is ardently desirous of softening and ameliorating the condition of the hard-working operatives of England. Right or wrong, this man has the quick feelings and sympathies of that susceptible and generous temperament which belongs alone to the higher order of natures. His warmth sometimes hurries him into passion, and makes him connect oppression with every case of suffering. But his errors are those of an enthusiast, the result of mistaken zeal, not of vicious disposition. He has nothing of the cold and sneering mood of the sceptic. On the contrary, he is a believer in whatever is most pure, disinterested, and virtuous in humanity.

"Some surprise has been expressed that we should have given such prominent notice of his poem, the 'Purgatory of Suicides.' It is a mistake to suppose that we spoke of it in terms of unreserved commendation, either as regarded its moral sentiment or poetic ability. We regarded it as a great, but imperfect and unequal work,—as a mighty fragment, roughly hewn from the quarry, and squared and shaped by the rugged hand of an energetic but unpractised master, bearing in its colossal proportions and decided traits, unquestionable marks of power, though wanting in those graceful and finished touches which throw round the creations of genius a sense of beauty and delight. Our remarks did not stand alone. They were accompanied by extracts to justify or refute them. Surely the quotations we gave might afford a better guide to the judgment of the candid reader, than the slight opinions of other journals. If the reading world has, from long disuse, lost its perception of what is striking and grand in composition, that is nothing to us. There are people who prefer Donizetti to Handel. They have a right to indulge their taste, but let them not insist on bringing all music to the Donizetti standard. We never thought of recommending the work indiscriminately. We were more anxious, indeed, to determine its true character, than to recommend it at all. We saw much to deplore in it; evidence of a state of mind that, notwithstanding grand bursts of talent, justifies the epithet of 'heathen' when applied to the religious belief, or, rather, non-belief of our manufacturing districts. But it is only weak people who close their eyes to shut out darkness. The poem, both in its merits and demerits, was far too remarkable a work—too significant of the times in which we live—to be passed by in silence, or with a brief notice. Opinions might differ as to the ability it displayed, though we cannot imagine that any head, with the slightest garniture of brain, could fail to recognise its splendid outbursts of poetic power, as worthy of the land that has produced Spenser and Milton; but there should have been no more than one opinion that the state of mind it revealed among the labouring classes of the community required the earnest consideration of a Christian people. The work we expressly indicated was a dangerous one, but dangerous more from the temper it indicated than any result it was likely to produce. Persons do not learn radicalism and infidelity from epics. They present nothing attractive to an idle or dissolute nature, and have nothing in common with the brutal and scurrilous organs of sedition. It is the attribute of poetry to exalt whatever it touches. We trace its heavenly origin in the hues with which it brightens mortal things. The frenzy of

a revolutionist, under its inspiration, swells into the heroic rapture of a Corneille, and the doubts of a sceptic into lofty speculations on high and solemn themes.

"These 'Wise Saws and Modern Instances,' though clever, are not exactly the kind of papers we should have looked for from the author. They are remarkable chiefly for the plain sense of their matter and the homeliness of their style. They resemble, in these respects, the tracts of Cobbett or the 'Village Dialogues' of Rowland Hill. They are mostly illustrations of humble life, intended to convey a useful moral, or correct a dangerous error, or exhibit an amusing peculiarity of character or manners. They evince a great deal of shrewd observation, and are touched with that broad humour which we seldom find apart from original talent in England, in whatever department of literature it is exercised. In these sketches there is the freedom and vigour, and something too of the coarseness, of one of the people thinking and speaking boldly. They are destitute of all the common ornaments of composition. But occasionally the feeling of the writer, working its way into his narrative, gives it life and animation, and, in spite of its extreme plainness of style, raises it almost into poetry, such poetry as we find in those tales of Crabbe that illustrate

'The short and simple annals of the poor.'

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"It will readily be gathered, that, whatever may be the author's Chartist opinions, there is nothing in the slightest degree objectionable in the papers we have named. But there are others of another class, in which are exhibited to us literal transcripts of the mind of the operative population in the manufacturing districts. Of this kind is the paper of 'Merrie England,' where a recruiting serjeant walks through the streets of a starving town, and a lad is rescued from him by the wretched population, who, reduced as they are, view his service with detestation, and are restrained from insurrection only by the consciousness of their weakness.

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"The author excuses the sternness of his pictures by alleging their truth. The justification is all-sufficient. Chartist as these sketches are, they are healthier, in tone and sentiment, than the tawdry fictions vamped up for the reading public by some popular writers that profess to exhibit the life of the labouring classes. Here, at all events, we have reality. If the scenes are distressing, they are instructive; it cannot be alleged against them that they are tricked out with all the embellishments of fancy for the gratification of pharisaical pride in the writer, for the sake of raising hatred between rich and poor, or for the purpose, by being more highly spiced, of obtaining greater favour with those readers who relish literature as a *gourmand* does game, in proportion as it is strongly flavoured."—*Britannia*, Nov. 8, 1845.

"But a few weeks have elapsed since we had to speak of Thomas Cooper, as a poet of a very high order, in fact one of those to whom the term *poet* in its deepest and fullest significance is rightly applied: we have now to

view him, and to exhibit him to our readers in a very different light. If his former work was characterised by profundity of thought, richness of imagination, and a power and majesty of rhythmical expression rarely equalled — the one before us is no less so for homeliness of language and simplicity of style, and the plain common-sense matters which form the subjects of the several tales comprising these 'Wise Saws and Modern Instances.' The versatility of true genius is happily illustrated in the contrast between these two works, and we think that no unprejudiced reader can deny that they exhibit different phases of a mind and intellect of extraordinary energy and power. There is a freedom and vigour in all the utterances of Thomas Cooper, which is quite refreshing to one wearied of the trivialities of artificial life; even his humour has a breadth which sometimes borders on coarseness; but we can forgive this for the sake of truth and honesty, and would have our readers do the like, remembering that Shakespeare and Burns were both open to this reproach, if reproach it may be called, and that no man can exhibit *faithful* pictures of life, and enter truly into the spirit of what is daily passing in this work-day world without coming in contact with, and rudely offending, some of those false notions of delicacy and refinement, which, if they give a certain polish to the *manners* of modern society, do not certainly tend to improve its *morals*. Our readers are not to imagine by this that there is anything disgustingly coarse or offensive to real delicacy in the tales before us; it is true they are most of them scenes in humble life, they are in truth 'the short and simple annals of the poor,' written with that simplicity and fidelity which can alone render them valuable to him who thinks with Pope that

'The proper study of mankind is man.'

"The portraits here given are real portraits, sketched by a close and shrewd observer, and the incidents related are such as might, and no doubt have, occurred within the sphere of the writer's observation and experience. They are no pictures for a lady's album — no tales for a book of the boudoir; but bold and free sketches, some of them rude and unlovely, but for that very reason the truer to nature, of toiling, struggling, suffering humanity. Of a truth, this Chartist agitation has thrown to the surface no more remarkable man than Thomas Cooper, and we much question if there be any one so fitted to represent the manufacturing masses, to describe their wants, and expound their wishes as he; gifted with great natural talent; possessing great acquirements, obtained by much bodily labour and mental discipline; ardent, energetic, and, we believe, incorruptible; with a feeling heart, and a will to do and a spirit to suffer whatsoever may seem best or necessary for the well-being of his brother men, he appears to us the very *beau ideal* of a people's champion."— *Kentish Independent*, Dec. 13. 1845.

"These volumes contain a number of sketches of character, and delineations of scene, drawn chiefly from humble life. They are well written and interesting. The extreme notions and some of the unsound views of the writer are occasionally introduced into them, but seldom, if ever, in an offensive manner. The stories contain some true and painful

pictures of the miserable condition of many of the poorest operatives; while others of them are of a humorous description. They cannot fail to be popular with the thinking and reading portion of the working-classes." —*Leicester Chronicle*, Dec. 6, 1845.

"These light and pleasing sketches of English provincial life and manners were composed by Mr. Cooper, as he informs us in the preface, whilst under confinement in Stafford jail, for political offences. We cannot but wonder that a person, obviously possessed of considerable powers, strong common sense, and knowledge of the world, should have committed himself to the miserable and injurious follies of physical-force Chartism; but that he is now a wiser, if a sadder man, we would venture to assert, from a perusal of these volumes. They are by no means imbued with political asperity, or seasoned with ultra-political doctrines, but exhibit on the contrary, a robust and manly, if not a very refined or cultivated mind, whilst the peculiar principles and opinions of the writer peep out occasionally, but subdued into a sound common-sense observation, and at times a laughing sneer at all political excess of opinion. The object of the writer is to give to some 'wise saw,' or 'modern instance,' a sort of visible embodiment and lively illustration in the action of a sketchy and truth-like story of real life. These are mostly drawn from humble life in the country towns and villages of England, and apparently not a few of them relate to 'Old Lincolnshire,' as the author fondly terms it, and which he seems to regret will soon disappear before 'New Lincolnshire,' with its 'railway civilization,' and modern aspects and ways. The stories are, as might be expected, of unequal merit, but many of them exhibit considerable vigour of pencil, shrewd sense, and clear-sighted observation, accompanied with a kindly, genial feeling and toleration, we were not prepared for from so determined a politician. There is also a strong dash of the vulgar in them, accompanied with a living truth of character, and strong dramatic effect, which give to them a reality and force which indicate them to be the fruits of a close observation and prying insight into the inward as well as the outward shows of motley human life and character."—*Glasgow Citizen*, Nov. 15, 1845.